

Harry's Choice

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Harry's Choice

by [JBankai89](#)

Summary

When Harry presents as an omega, he is given an impossible choice—be wed to Lucius Malfoy, a man who would delight in making him suffer for his part in the war, or bind himself to Remus Lupin, a man who he has always seen as an uncle and nothing more.

Though the choice is obvious, somehow, that doesn't make it any easier.

DO NOT TRANSLATE OR REPOST

Notes

A/N: The prologue is a bit on the short side, but I promise that the first actual chapter will be longer. Next update will be October 7th. Enjoy ^.^

The Claim

Prologue: The Claim

“You can't ask this of me,” Remus said, his eyes narrowed with anger as he levelled his gaze with the headmaster, and Albus bowed his head solemnly.

“I am afraid that you are the only one able to protect him,” Albus replied sadly. “It is out of my hands—as a beta, there is little I can do to help him. Even in these times of peace, it seems that he is destined to have anything but a normal life.”

“Has he presented yet?” Remus asked, ignoring the statement. “Does he even understand what is happening to him?”

“He presented last week, and is currently running the course of his first heat under Poppy’s supervision,” Albus said. “It is not so unusual for an omega to present so late. As I recall, Sirius was the same.”

“Presented at twenty-one,” Remus replied, his gaze dropping at the recollection of it. “He presented, then he went to Azkaban. I didn't even have time to...” He trailed off and shook his head. What was gone, was gone. There was little point lamenting on it now.

“And Harry is merely twenty,” Albus continued. “You know that I would not ask this of you, Remus, but Lucius Malfoy has made a claim on him through the Ministry—an attempt to mend his family's broken image, no doubt. As a beta, there is nothing I can do to stop his attempts; but you, as an alpha, you can contest it—claim Harry, and save him from a life of torment.”

“He is like a son to me,” Remus countered, “he is Teddy's godfather—he is *family*. You cannot seriously think that Harry would accept me as his mate.”

“You are the *only one*, Remus,” Albus pressed. “Need I list the candidates for you? Almost all of Harry's friends are beta or omega, and many of the adult alphas that he knows are mated already. The only other alphas are my brother, Aberforth, and Mundungus Fletcher, both of whom, I gather, Harry would be even *less* willing to mate with.

“You are his only family, but not by blood; he loves you and trusts you, and knows that you would never hurt him or take advantage of him,” Albus concluded, his tone virtually unchanged from the bland tone Remus had grown up hearing, but now there was a pleading edge to it.

“Werewolves are highly possessive of their mates,” Remus said, his tone icy, but he should have known better than to hope it would intimidate the older man. “If I were to mark him, my instincts would make me...shall we say, *unwilling* to share him. I would be condemning him to a life he would not want—he'd never be able to choose his own partner, or live a life with someone he would love. He'd be trapped.”

“And without you, he would be forced by the Ministry to bind himself to Lucius Malfoy,” Albus reminded him patiently. “One way or another, Harry has very little choice in the matter. At least with you he would be safe, and need not fear nightly sexual assaults or forced pregnancy.”

Remus ground his teeth as he clenched his hands into fists. This wasn't fair, to Harry or to himself. He'd hardly even had time to mourn Dora, and already another partner—an *unwilling* one, this time—was being foisted upon him.

“I know that this seems unfair to you,” Albus continued patiently, his fingers threaded together as he spoke, “and if I saw another avenue for us to take, I would have done so, but there is not. You, as they say, are *it*.”

“Daddy?”

A sleepy voice broke up the conversation, and Remus shifted his gaze to the hall, where Teddy stood in his little white pyjamas, patterned with kneazles, rubbing his eyes with one hand, his violet hair askew from sleep, and dragging his toy bear in the other. Based on his son's demeanour, Remus could tell what was the matter almost immediately.

“Another nightmare, Ted?” he asked, and the boy nodded, whimpering a little as he toddled into the front room of their little house, and clambered into his father's lap while he ignored Albus's presence completely. This didn't exactly shock Remus either; Teddy's M.O. with new people tended to veer towards *ignore* until Remus reminded Teddy to say hello.

This evening however, Remus wasn't particularly inclined towards politeness with his former headmaster, not after their discussion.

“I'm sorry, Albus,” Remus said as he stood with his son in his arms, continually rubbing little Teddy's back while his child clung to him. “But I must see to my son—you understand.”

“And Harry?”

Remus ground his teeth. He'd rather hoped that the distraction of his son would have shifted the old man's focus, but in hindsight, he should have known better.

“Give me two days to think it over,” Remus said at last, “it is a big decision that will affect both of us for the rest of our lives, and I cannot take it lightly.”

“I understand,” Albus replied, he bowing his head a little in acknowledgement. “I will be in touch. Harry's heat will likely end soon, and I need to check on him regardless.”

The word *heat* had a strange effect on Remus, who shivered involuntarily at the sound of it, but he was certain that it was out of concern for Harry, and not some sort of shameful desire.

Albus, in contrast, merely offered him and Teddy a small smile before he made his way to Remus's fire grate, and disappeared in a swirl of green flame. Teddy had not said a word, but

merely rested his head upon his father's shoulder, sucking his thumb while he stared up at him.

“Come on,” Remus said softly as he turned towards the stairs, “let's get you back to bed.”

The Talk

Chapter Notes

A/N: Here is the first real chapter, of a much nicer length :P please enjoy. Next update is scheduled for October 21st.

Chapter One – The Talk

Harry stood outside the quaint little house, his rucksack over one shoulder, while his stomach churned with nervousness. He'd agreed to this, after all, but it still didn't sit right with him.

In fact, all of it felt deeply, horribly *wrong*.

“I’m...I’m a what?” Harry sputtered as he gazed at his former headmaster, who did little more than hang his head slightly.

“I am sorry, Harry,” he said, and unlike with all the other times the man had spoken those same words to him, this time it sounded as though he truly meant it. “It was Mr Weasley who informed me of your condition, and it is a good thing that he did, too.”

“Why’s that, then?” Harry asked sourly, “because it gives you an opportunity to interfere even more in my life? You told me that my soul was completely my own, after I’d destroyed the last Horcrux and then Voldemort, and you revealed that you weren’t actually dead. Does that not include my life as well? I’ve paid my dues, sir, I don’t want to lose the rest of my life to some prophecy—”

“It is nothing of the sort, Harry,” Albus replied patiently while he steeped his fingers together and gazed at the young man from across Harry’s little kitchen table, “as I said, you are an omega. Without delving too deeply in Magical History, it is believed that the secondary sexual organs of certain wizards developed around two thousand years ago.

“As you have no doubt heard from other sources, if the magical community had not begun to marry into non-magic families, we would have most assuredly died out. To remedy this, our bodies became more adapted than a muggle’s is for bearing children, and it is estimated that about two-thirds of the wizard population can become pregnant and safely carry a child to term. Those who can accomplish this are beta women and omega men. Wizards with the capabilities to breed with omega men are known as alphas, and those witches and wizards who have no such added anatomy are known as beta.

“Unfortunately, omega men have been treated in much the same way that muggle women are treated over the centuries—that is to say, rather poorly, to put it lightly. Even to this day, our treatment of omega wizards is slow-going, which is why I have come to you today.”

“What exactly does that mean?” Harry asked as he swallowed nervously. “I mean...that sounds...bad.”

Harry winced at the phrasing, but Albus did not reassure him that it wasn't as bad as it seemed. Instead, to Harry's dismay, Albus bowed his head again, and slowly withdrew a scroll of parchment from inside his robes.

“One of the Ministry legalities regarding omega wizards is arranged marriage,” he said, his voice almost solemn as he spoke. “Often it is organized by the parents, but in your case, I imagine that your aunt and uncle would not know to test for alpha, beta, or omega blood at age seven, nor, I believe, would they be willing to do so.”

“You're not wrong,” Harry mumbled in agreement, and Albus offered him a small, weak smile.

“Be that as it may, an unfortunate party has discovered how you have been classed following your first heat from a fortnight previously, and he has officially made a claim for your hand in marriage.”

“Based on your expression, I'd imagine it's not the wizard equivalent of Fabio,” Harry said dryly, and Albus let out a warm chuckle.

“I am afraid not,” he replied at last, sobering so quickly that for a moment Harry almost asked if it was Voldemort, despite the fact that the man was dead. “The problem that we now face, Harry, is that unless another alpha steps in to contest the claim, this person will be free to marry you, regardless how little you may want it.”

“How is that even fair?” Harry demanded incredulously, and the older man offered him a sad smile.

“It isn't fair, and on a baser level, the Ministry knows it, but as of yet there have not been any significant changes made to these laws—in particular, not enough pressure to warrant any form of drastic change. Money talks, as the saying goes.”

“Money...” Harry trailed off, something about the phrasing sparking something in Harry, and his gaze jerked up in alarm as everything clicked together in his mind. “Oh no. No. Not him.”

“Yes,” Albus replied gravely, “I am afraid that Lucius beat us to the proverbial punch, and has put in a claim for you.”

“But how can he?” Harry demanded incredulously, “He's on house arrest for thirty years, Narcissa left him and took Draco to the continent...it doesn't make sense! What would he want with someone like me?”

“You mean someone young, rich, handsome, and politically influential?” Albus asked mildly, making Harry flush slightly. “I believe it is the possibility that associating with you might change his image for the better, more than anything else, is what is driving him at the moment.

“That being said, if you are comfortable with it, Harry, I thought I would approach one of the unmated alphas that I know, and ask them to contest the claim for you, given that you are unable to fight this claim all on your own,” Albus continued. “The choice of who you will mate I leave entirely to you, Harry.”

After being left with a short list of just three names— *Aberforth Dumbledore, Remus Lupin, and Mundungus Fletcher*— the choice of who to choose seemed quite obvious to Harry, if a bit terrifying at the same time.

Maybe I’ll be able to divorce him or something once everything with Lucius is sorted, and I can have some kind of normal life, Harry mused as he shuffled slowly up the walkway of his new home, drawing it out as long as he could. *Remus wouldn’t object to that, right? I mean, he’s old enough to be my dad; he wouldn’t want me to be stuck with someone I have no feelings towards like that...*

The trouble was, Harry wasn’t so sure about that. There was so much about this Alpha-Beta-Omega business that he didn’t understand. What if he was *stuck* with Remus for the rest of his life?

Harry shifted from foot to foot uncertainly. The thought was confusing—Remus was a good man. He was kind, and brave, and a wonderful father.

But he was older. *Much* older, and he had been best mates with Harry’s own father. That in itself made the forced partnership feel wrong to him—very wrong.

Harry shook his head as he tried to rid himself of the last dregs of his nervousness. Surely Remus would be able to sense it, either from his werewolf traits, or his alpha ones—Harry wasn’t certain which.

He knocked on the door, and forced himself to ignore his own trembling. This was leaps and bounds better than Lucius, and that small piece of information helped Harry to move forwards, instead of running off screaming.

The door opened almost at once, and Harry started a little at what he was seeing. By and large, Remus looked the same as he always did—same brown corduroy trousers, same tan wool cardigan, same everything—but at the same time, he was different, if only slightly.

At first, Harry thought it was something superficial—he had clearly showered recently, his hair had been trimmed, and the short beard he had been growing out was cut close to the skin, leaving it as an attractive sandy-coloured stubble, flecked with bits of grey. His skin was a

healthy pink, and there was no exhaustion that Harry could discern in the older man's usually tired eyes.

All of these things, though nice to see, wasn't what Harry was noticing, however. It took him a moment to realize that he'd been staring blankly at the older man for nearly a full minute, and hadn't said a word, which caused him to flush with embarrassment, and drop his gaze quickly.

"Er...hello," Harry said at last, directing the words to the man's shoulder, and Remus offered him a weak smile.

"Hello, Harry," Remus replied kindly as he motioned to the interior of the house, silently inviting him to come in.

Harry followed his lead, starting a little when his arm brushed accidentally against Remus's front, and he jumped away as though he'd been burned.

"Sorry," Harry mumbled, flushing red as he looked away from the older man. "I didn't mean to react like that."

"All things considered, it's fair," Remus replied with a small smile. "Come with me to the sitting room. We can have something to eat, and discuss things."

"Discuss?" Harry asked uncertainly "I thought...well, Dumbledore made it sound as though I had very little choice in the matter."

"There is always a choice, Harry," Remus replied, his tone stiff and hard, but Harry could tell that the anger he heard in the older man's voice was not directed at him, but at their predicament. "Though I have contested Lucius's claim, nothing has yet been finalized. I wished to speak to you before I signed anything—in case you had a change of heart."

Harry eyed Remus quizzically at that; it almost sounded as though Remus *hoped* that Harry would change his mind about all of this.

But what choice do I have? Harry wondered as Remus led him away from the front hall and into the sitting room, which was looking more tidy than usual, with Teddy's toys all nicely put away, a roaring fire in the grate to stave off the winter chill, and a platter of home-baked cakes rested upon the coffee table, along with a pot of tea.

It was then that Harry realized two things at once—the first was that Teddy seemed to be absent, and the second was that Harry realized that he wasn't noticing something different about Remus's appearance at all. He looked exactly the same as he always did these days, in fact, there was no difference in his looks at *whatsoever*.

It was his scent.

Harry could *smell* the alpha in him.

"Er...where's Teddy?" Harry asked in an effort to distract himself from how *good* Remus smelled, his voice escaping him with a tremor, and Remus's mouth quirked into a small

frown.

“Andromeda’s for the day with Bastet,” Remus replied as he sat down, and began to pour the tea into two overlarge mugs. Harry set his rucksack down next to the sofa, and joined him. “I thought it might be best to do this without him around as a distraction, and if you decide to go forward with this, we can discuss how to tell him.”

“That’s fine, but...who’s Bastet?” Harry asked with a weak laugh, and Remus offered him a familiar warm smile.

“Teddy’s new kitten,” Remus replied with a chuckle of his own. “Perhaps I forgot to tell you in all the chaos. I got her for Teddy for Christmas, and needless to say, Teddy was transported. She’s a little black ball of fur who follows Teddy around like a duckling. It’s quite cute, actually.”

“And she doesn’t react to your...er, werewolf traits?”

“Not so far, which is a blessing, really—I’ve always been rather fond of cats, ironically enough, but I’ve never had one before. It’s been...a challenge.”

“Really? More than a rambunctious three-year-old?” Harry asked as he added a little milk to his mug, and slowly, he began to relax. The odd scent that permeated from Remus was calming, and paired with the familiar conversation, he felt far less stressed than he had while at the door. *Why* he found the smell of the man suddenly so pleasant was a mystery unto itself, but for the moment, Harry was content to ignore it.

“I have Teddy running around like a small rhinoceros during the day, and Bastet replaces him at night,” Remus replied with a small chuckle. “At the moment, her favourite activity is running up and down the halls at top speed, thundering far louder than a kitten her size *should* be able to. Teddy sleeps through it all, of course, but I’ve been forced out of bed more than once by her getting into things she’s not supposed to—such as my wardrobe.”

“What, she puked in your shoes?”

“She somehow managed to unravel my favourite cardigan, and turned it into nothing more than a huge pile of yarn,” Remus said as he groaned a little, and Harry snorted. “Thank goodness for Molly, she helped to put it right, but honestly that cat is nothing but trouble.”

Remus sighed and shook his head, but he was still smiling, which told Harry that he didn’t really fault the kitten for her little acts of wardrobe terrorism. The older man brought the mug to his lips, filled to the brim with milk and sugar, and sipped, before he sighed again, and turned to face Harry more fully.

“I suppose we should stop beating around the bush, and discuss why you are here.”

“To keep me out of Lucius’s depraved grasp,” Harry filled in, and Remus nodded.

“More or less. I wish it had not come to this, Harry, you deserve a full life, and more than what I can give you. If you agree to this, I hate that I feel as though I am trapping you, not...”

he trailed off and shook his head. “How much did Albus tell you about all of this?”

“Not much,” Harry admitted as he sipped at his own tea, and tried to ignore the way his insides began to twist with nervousness. “He told me what I was, gave me a bit of history on *how* I’m able to conceive children and all of that, and that the Ministry is completely backwards when it comes to protection of people like me, and apparently you are the only one with the ability to protect me from that—well, you or Dung or Aberforth, apparently. But I was thinking...can’t we just act like flatmates or something? I stay here, and we lead our own separate lives?”

Harry’s voice fizzled out as he finished his question, and even without a proper response, he already knew that it was no good.

“There are a few reasons that we cannot do that, Harry,” Remus replied softly, his gaze fixed upon his mug, rather than Harry as he spoke. “Some reasons are my own selfish ones, and others are due to legalities implemented by the Ministry, with supposed good intentions, though I’ve yet to decipher how *good* these intentions are.

“The legal reasons are that the Ministry expects a bonding from these claims, and I will be forced to mark you as mine, and often they will come to verify that I have done so. I do not doubt that Lucius will find a way to insist upon it, in fact, perhaps as a ruse to force you to leave here, and enable him to take you.”

“Mark me?” Harry asked nervously, “what do you mean...mark? Like the Dark Mark?”

“No, no, nothing like that,” Remus replied quickly as he glanced up with wide eyes, and set aside his mug as the older man shifted incrementally closer, startling Harry a little, but he managed to keep still as Remus reached out and traced a small circle around a spot at the hollow of Harry’s throat, making him shiver.

“That is the omega’s Bonding Gland,” Remus said, his voice dropping to a softer, almost husky tone. “When one wishes to bond with an omega, they need only to bite there, scarring the omega and marking them as taken—something akin to a marriage in the muggle world, but much more permanent.”

“But if you do that...won’t I...you know, *turn*?”

“That is why I asked you to come here on this specific date,” Remus replied as he pulled back a little and scooped up his mug, though Harry could not help but notice how much closer Remus was to him this time. “Tomorrow is the new moon, the time farthest from the full moon, and as a result I have no chance of infecting you. I should note that there is no werewolf on record ever having been turned by a werewolf in human form, but I did not want to tempt fate. You have the unfortunate habit of defying the laws of nature at almost every turn.”

“You’re not wrong,” Harry said with a small snort, and Remus smiled a little. “So...what’s the big deal? You mark me, and we carry on as we always have after the Ministry meeting...thing.”

“Because in marking you, I will bind you to me, and I am...shall we say, *possessive* when it comes to my partners. I would never hurt you, or try to stop you from seeing your friends or family, but I cannot share my partners with another person, and a binding of this sort will inevitably spark within me a sexual need for you. When you go into heat, I doubt that I will be able to keep myself away from you for very long. The bonds of an alpha and omega pair are nigh unbreakable, and it would likely be painful for both of us to try and maintain some sort of non-sexual relationship, should you choose to allow me to mark you.”

“Oh.” Harry broke off as he flushed a deep pink, and tried to imagine himself in the throes of passion with any of the men on Albus’s short list of supposed suitors, including the one who sat across from him. “Er...is this strictly a werewolf thing, or an alpha thing?”

“Both,” Remus said, frowning into his mug again. He shifted a little, his guilt at the whole ordeal clear upon his face as he spoke. “From my readings, all alphas feel the pull to be sexual with their chosen mate, even outside of heat. As I understand it, it is nature’s way of ensuring procreation—if you feel sexual towards your partner, you’re more likely to breed them. That is by and large academic speculation, however, though I know myself well enough to be certain that if you choose to go forward with this, our old relationship will be lost to us.”

“Would you want that?” Harry asked uncertainly, in a much smaller voice than he’d intended. “To...to...breed?”

“I have my hands full with Teddy at the moment, but I cannot say what the future might bring,” Remus replied, the academic, professorish lilt gone from his voice, and it had taken on a more gentle tone. “I would not *breed* you, Harry—not without your permission. Having children is a wonderful thing, but a very serious matter. You are still fairly young, and I would not wish to twist your arm and make you feel obligated to carry a child for me, especially if you do not wish to.”

“You keep talking about *my* wishes and *my* choices...” Harry muttered as he dropped his gaze to his own mug. “Considering my other options, what choice do I really have in the matter? It’s you or...” Harry shuddered, unwilling to speak it aloud, while Remus barked a bitter laugh.

“Of course, you’re right,” Remus said as he adopted a sad sort of smile. “I suppose I was fooling myself, thinking either of us had any say in the matter, but...we’ll make the best of it, yes?”

“Yeah,” Harry agreed with a weak smile of his own. “We will.”

Marking

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hi guys, thank you so much for the positive feedback on this story! ^.^ I hope you enjoy this week's update, and the next one will be up November 4th.

Chapter Two – Marking

It was somewhat surreal for Harry to watch Remus sign the Omega Claim paperwork and send it off. There was a look of guilt in the older man's eyes as he did so, as though he had no desire to take Harry's life from him, but at the same time, both of them knew that this was far better option than any of the alternatives.

I hope I can learn to love him like I'm supposed to , Harry thought as he watched Remus's screech owl soar into the setting sun before it blinked out of view. His gaze flicked to Remus for a moment, but looking at the older man made him oddly nervous, and he quickly shifted his eyes back to the window. Remus was now, for all intents and purposes, his *husband* .

More than that, legally, Remus *owned* him.

The implication that he was little more than property in the eyes of the Ministry made Harry feel sick, and he tried to push it away, though he couldn't decide which was worse—seeing Remus as his husband, or his master.

“Harry?”

Remus's voice sounded small and uncertain, and when Harry turned back to him, his expression seemed to only amplify it. It was odd to see Remus less than sure of himself, in particular when Harry recalled how brave and strong he had been during the war—and the aftermath.

Poor Tonks, Harry thought, his mind straying to Teddy, and how because of Voldemort, he would now grow up without a mother, but with two fathers instead.

Oh my God, does that make me the wicked stepmother? Harry felt his head spin with panic at the concept, and at the same time, he realized belatedly that Remus was speaking, but the words made no sense. His brow furrowed as he focused on them, and slowly the world came back into focus.

“—not our concern right now,” Remus finished, and Harry blinked.

“What’s not our concern right now?”

“Teddy. Weren’t you listening?”

“No.”

Remus offered him an amused smirk, as though he wasn’t certain whether or not to reprimand Harry for his lack of attention, but in the end he shook his head, turned, and motioned for Harry to follow him as he said, “come on, I’ll show you where our room is, and you can get unpacked.”

Our room.

Harry tried to keep from shivering at the concept.

After Harry had scooped up his rucksack, Remus led him away from the sitting room and to a set of wooden stairs layered with plush carpeting. Harry followed Remus up to the second landing, which bore four closed doors. Harry knew Remus’s house well enough that the rooms led to a toilet, guest room, Teddy’s room, and Remus’s room.

The last one made Harry squirm uncomfortably again, though he tried to keep it from showing too much. He knew that Remus felt as bad about this as he did, and Harry hated that he was acting like he was set to share a bed with a flobberworm.

“You can put your clothes in the wardrobe next to mine,” Remus said, his voice distracted as he pushed open the bedroom door and stepped inside, while Harry followed. “I tend to favour the right side of the bed, so take the left, and you can use all the drawers in the bedside table on that side. You can leave your toiletries in the bathroom, and when you’ve finished, we can talk some more, if you like.”

Remus rushed out of the room before Harry could respond, and he frowned as he watched the older man head back towards the stairs. Harry’s shoulders sagged in disappointment, while he glanced down to his bag’s strap that was still over his shoulder. How could this possibly work if Remus couldn’t stand to be in the same room with him?

“I guess I’m not exactly his ideal, either,” Harry muttered to himself, thinking of Tonks as he dumped his bag on the bed, and moved to unzip it.

~*~

An hour later, Harry felt no less at home with his things put away next to Remus’s in the wardrobe, and his small collection of books stacked on the night table, with his invisibility

cloak, broken mirror, photo album and Marauder's Map in the drawer. It felt perfectly odd, and no matter how many times he tried to clear his mind of his confusion, it seemed almost stuck, and Harry couldn't quite believe that this was really real. It was just too *bizarre*.

With Remus clearly avoiding him on top of everything, it made Harry even more depressed to realize that he was about as wanted in this house as a bad case of foot fungus.

I suppose I need to be realistic, Harry thought as he carried his few toiletries from the bedroom to the bathroom, his expression twisted into a sour look as he put away the shampoo bottles next to Remus's hair potion. *He clearly has a stronger interest in women, not men, so this is probably disgusting to him, on top of how weird it is for me to even imagine him naked...he's like an uncle to me!*

But if that's true, then why did he say all that stuff before about how after I've been marked by him, he'll want to have sex with me? Harry wondered, chewing on his bottom lip as he added his toothbrush to the cup by the sink. *Does this mark-thing force him to be gay?*

"I suppose the logical thing would be to *ask* him..." Harry muttered to himself as he returned to the bedroom, and tucked away the now-empty bag into the bottom of the wardrobe, but he still didn't feel exactly at home in the new space.

"I hope Teddy gets back soon," Harry muttered as he descended the stairs, "at least then I'll have something to distract me..."

Back in the sitting room Harry found Remus with his nose buried in a book, and a fresh cup of tea in front of him, though it appeared as though he'd barely touched it.

"Er...I'm done putting my stuff away," Harry said awkwardly as he stood in the entryway of the sitting room, jumping a little when Remus's gaze snapped to him, his eyes widened slightly, as though he had not expected Harry to appear. "I just wasn't sure...what I'm supposed to do now."

"You may do whatever you like," Remus replied, and returned his attention to his book and tea. "This is your home now, Harry, and you're not expected to do anything that you do not wish to."

"I just..." Harry sighed as he shifted from one foot to the other. "I don't know what to do with myself, I suppose."

"You can sit with me a while, if that would make you feel better," Remus said, setting aside his book again as he patted the opposite side of the sofa invitingly. "I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable, Harry, I was just trying to give you some space. I can't imagine that this had been easy for you."

Harry smiled at the invitation, and hurried over to sit next to him. Being near Remus felt calming, like a cooling salve on a burn, though he didn't fully understand *why* he found Remus's presence so soothing. He wasn't keen to over-analyse it however, at least not at the present moment.

“No,” he agreed as he settled down next to the older man. “I mean...it’s been utter chaos, figuring this out, and I was forced onto temporary leave until I could find a mate...apparently having an unmated omega in the workplace is somehow...bad? And then Albus popped by and told me about Lucius, and...I think if anything else happens, my head might explode.”

“Some alphas claim that having an unmated omega in the workplace is distracting,” Remus replied with a disapproving frown. “It’s ridiculous, and utterly preposterous—these alphas just want an excuse to penalize an omega for their own poor behaviour.”

“I guess in a hospital setting it makes a bit of sense, but I still don’t quite get how a trainee healer in any capacity could be *distracting*,” Harry added as he wrinkled his nose.

“It all goes back to alphas believing that they are superior to omegas,” Remus said disapprovingly, while he shook his head a little. “I have even seen some alphas go so far as to forbid their partners to work. It is quite horrendous.”

“So...you won’t do that to me...right?” Harry asked tentatively, and flushed when Remus shot him a disapproving frown.

“No, of course not,” Remus replied crossly. “As soon as all this...*unpleasantness* is sorted out, you can go back to work whenever you like. I don’t want this to hinder your life whatsoever.”

“Not that I have much choice right now,” Harry muttered as he shifted his gaze to the glowing coals in the grate. “My supervisor *insisted* I take at least three weeks off to sort this out. They’re treating it like...like...a *honeymoon*.”

Remus chuckled when Harry made a sour face, and he lurched forward as though he wanted to touch him, but stopped at the last moment, and instead fixed his attention upon his teacup. Harry watched him for a moment longer, in particular the way Remus’s eyes refused to stay focused on the beverage, and they often shifted over to Harry, a near-hungry look in his soft amber eyes.

Maybe there’s a little truth to that belief that I’d be a distraction, after all, Harry mused, almost in jest. He poised himself to ask Remus about it when the older man suddenly let out a soft, defeated sort of sigh, and set the mug down on the coffee table next to his novel.

“I suppose there is no point stalling any longer,” Remus said with another defeated sigh as he shifted his gaze to Harry, and offered him a weak smile. “If we are to do this, perhaps it might be best to do it before Teddy gets home, so that the new information is easier for him to...digest.”

“*This?*” Harry asked weakly. “You mean...the mark thing?” Remus nodded.

“If you’re sure, Harry,” Remus said softly. “I don’t want to do this to you if you are uncertain. I don’t want to hurt you, and I do not mean to pressure you, I’m just trying to do what is right...the trouble is, I am not entirely certain what that is anymore.”

“My other options would hurt me more,” Harry pointed out with a weak laugh. “I mean...I’m not sure, not *really*, but I know it’s you, and...” he trailed off, and shivered, thinking of how awful it would be to be stuck with Lucius. Harry pushed back his uncertainties as he took a small breath, and tilted his head to the side, displaying his bonding gland to the alpha. “I trust you, Remus.”

Remus let out a soft, shaky breath, and Harry bit his lip, willing himself to remain still as the older man’s hand moved to cradle the side of Harry’s head, his fingers twining through his hair, and the pads of the digits pressed gently against Harry’s scalp.

“Have you thought about this, Harry?” Remus asked, his voice soft and heavy with concern. “*Properly*? Once I do this...it’s irreversible. You would be stuck with me for the rest of your life.”

“You already signed those papers, Remus,” Harry reminded him as he shifted a little closer, and he felt himself relax a little more. Being near Remus felt good, but not necessarily in a sexual way. He felt safe, and he trusted that Remus was truly trying to do what was best for the both of them, and save Teddy from too much confusion when he finally returned home. It was a complicated situation, this Harry knew, and there was no simple way to approach the issue.

“I know that I did,” Remus replied, a note of desperation in his voice. “But...I still feel as though I am taking your life from you if I mark you.”

“Would you rather nullify the paperwork, and have me go off to be at the mercy of Lucius Malfoy?” Harry asked idly, and Remus’s lip curled back, almost in a growl.

Clearly, Remus *really* didn’t like that idea.

Without another word, Remus began to inch closer, stopping when Harry could feel the older man’s breath tickling across his exposed skin. He shivered, but remained still as Remus got closer and closer, his breath hitching as Remus’s lips brushed over his pulse point, and he tensed in anticipation.

“I promise, Harry,” Remus murmured softly, “whatever happens...I promise that I will be good to you, I will keep you safe. I promise...”

“I trust you, Remus,” Harry replied, his breath catching a little as Remus leant in again, uttering a low growl as his tongue traced the pulse point again, circling it, and his hands on Harry tensed slightly—possessively.

Before Harry could ask about this sudden shift in behaviour, he gasped as he felt a pressure against his throat, mere seconds before the skin gave under the werewolf’s teeth, and Harry’s breath hitched, but the expected pain never came.

The pressure continued, and Harry could feel Remus’s teeth digging deeper into his skin, ensuring that the injury would scar, but it was completely painless. It felt odd, in particular when Remus’s teeth slowly extracted themselves from the wound he’d created, and they were replaced by his tongue, which swept over the wound, lapping up the blood, and creating a

strange tingling effect upon the surface of his skin. This one, however, Harry recognized from his countless injuries he'd sustained over the years, both from the war, and later from violent patients at St Mungo's—healing magic.

Somehow, impossibly, Remus's saliva was *healing* Harry's wound.

Harry whimpered, confused and a little bit aroused as Remus held tightly to him, and gasped when the werewolf shifted slightly, and he felt a hard, distinctive *something* press into his thigh.

Remus was *hard* for him.

"R-Remus..." Harry gasped weakly, uncertain what to do, when suddenly the older man pulled himself roughly from Harry's throat, tangled his fingers once more in Harry's untidy hair, and crushed their mouths together.

Harry gasped again, his eyes bulging as his fingers curled against the older man's chest, wanting to stop him, but also wanting to draw him closer. No one had ever kissed him like this before, and though it seemed a bit quick to him, all things considered, but neither did it feel *wrong*.

"Remus," Harry repeated, panting softly against the older man's mouth, his eyelids fluttering as his fingers twined through the front of the older man's cardigan, and tried to figure out what to do, only to find himself at a loss for how to conduct himself before his *mate*.

"Bloody hell, Harry..." Remus murmured, the older man's eyes half-lidded with obvious lust, but at the same time, he pulled away from Harry as though he'd been burned. "I'm so sorry, I just..."

"Just what?" Harry asked after Remus had trailed off, but seemed to have forgotten that he was speaking when after a full minute, he did not resume his explanation.

"I've never had an omega like this before," he explained, his eyes downcast and his expression sheepish. "When I marked you it was like this sudden explosion of lust in my mind, like the most powerful aphrodisiac. I'm sorry, I shouldn't have done that."

"As far as bad behaviour goes, that wasn't anything particularly reprehensible," Harry said with a weak smile, and Remus huffed a laugh. "I...well..." he paused, and flushed. "I liked it."

Harry's voice escaped him as a soft whisper, and when he voiced the confession, he wasn't entirely certain whether he wanted Remus to hear it or not. Regardless, the werewolf's gaze snapped up in surprise, making it clear that he *had* heard what Harry had said, but before Remus could say a word, Harry quickly rushed forward before he could get the wrong idea.

"I mean...it's all a bit confusing," Harry continued as he reached up to rake a hand through his hair. "This is all happening so fast, and this is all stuff that is supposed to take *time* to happen, and it's all happening in the blink of an eye. It's like...like...this is supposed to be forever, right? And...if it's forever, I don't want to muck it up. I want to make it good for you,

but I don't know what part of it is good, you know? And I don't know what you like yet, but I feel like I just want to crawl under your skin and never leave."

"Oh, God, that sounds so weird, I didn't mean that." Harry continued in a rush, his cheeks flushing a deep pink as he continued to ramble. "I'm sorry. I don't know what I'm doing, or saying, or any of it."

Harry buried his face in his hands, but Remus did not seem content to allow Harry to hide from him, and brushed his fingers over his chin, forcing his gaze back up, and Harry felt like a deer caught by a hunter as Remus's golden gaze locked with his.

"Harry," Remus breathed, his voice escaping him as a sigh, and his breath tickled across Harry's lips. Remus smelt so *good*, of parchment and ink, and tea mixed with spearmint. It made Harry want to weep and moan, and it was all happening so *fast* that Harry felt his head spin with an overwhelm of thoughts as he tried to decide how to react to what was happening.

"R-Remus..." Harry replied, his voice less self-assured than the older man's was, and it sounded weak and uncertain to his own ears.

"It...it's the bond making us act this way," Remus murmured, his lips a hairsbreadth away from Harry's. "It will calm soon, but marking you sent out an explosion of pheromones into the air, compelling us to...to..."

"*Mate*," Harry filled in, the word coming to him easily, and he let out a small, feeble moan of longing. "H-how soon is soon?"

"I don't know."

"It's a bit odd to hear you, of all people, saying that you don't know," Harry teased, and Remus's lips quirked into a wry smile.

"No cheek from you," he retorted, while Harry, testing the waters, inched a little closer, and smiled weakly.

"Why does this feel so...so...*right*?" Harry asked, his tone almost breathless as his gaze dropped from Remus's eyes to his lips, but he fought against the sudden impulse he had to kiss him. "Is it all pheromones?"

"Yes it is, Harry," Remus replied, his voice trembling as though he, too, was struggling with the need to get closer to Harry.

Or kiss him, or shag him—Harry wasn't certain which.

"How can we even trust ourselves, then?" Harry asked nervously, "I sort of remember being completely freaked out by this, and now it's like a switch has been flipped in my brain and I don't care anymore...I just *want* it."

"It won't last, Harry," Remus said, his voice calm and reassuring as he reached up to card his fingers through Harry's hair. Harry sighed, and leant eagerly into the touch. "I've no idea how long, it varies with every mated pair, but it won't be long..."

“I can’t decide if I want it to last forever, or stop,” Harry mused as he shifted to rest his head on Remus’s shoulder while the older man continued to stroke his hair lightly. The contact was doing little to dim Harry’s arousal, but even so, he didn’t want Remus to stop.

“I don’t want to do this with you when we are both so clearly under the influence,” Remus murmured, his hand stilling at the nape of Harry’s neck before it travelled slowly around to Harry’s chin, and he tilted the omega’s head up to press a light kiss to his lips. “I don’t want to force you—magically or otherwise.”

“I trust you, Remus,” Harry replied without hesitation, and he felt a smile upon his alpha’s lips as he pressed a kiss to the omega’s temple.

Harry shut his eyes, and allowed his mind to drift lazily, while he enjoyed this newfound sense of safety that he felt with the man that held him.

A Child's Curiosity

Chapter Notes

A/N: Next update is scheduled for November 18th. Please note that I am also participating in NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month) and while this doesn't usually screw up my update schedule, if there or any delays, I fully blame NaNo :P

Chapter Three – A Child's Curiosity

It took more than an hour for the pheromones to wear off. In that time, Harry and Remus hardly moved from the sofa. Each attempt to part ways was met with a feverish need for their mate, and they would find themselves locked together at the lips once more, kissing and clinging to each other desperately, as though they had been separated for many months, and not a handful of seconds.

When the effect of the pheromones did at last fade, Harry felt it acutely, like the sudden end to a swell. His mind seemed to clear and his cock wilted, and he pulled back from Remus, his face flushed as he tried to catch his breath and sort out what had just happened.

Remus seemed to be faring no better as he gazed at Harry through bleary, lustful eyes, his chest heaving, though, Harry noted, his straining erection had not gone away.

Harry didn't know how he felt about that. Part of his mind—the small part that was still hazy from the sheer *need* he'd felt not too long ago—was strangely relieved; surely having a partner who wanted him was better than a partner that thought he was disgusting, wasn't it?

But on the other hand, Harry still felt that it was *beyond* strange that he and Remus had *kissed*. Had that really happened? Did he just have a wildly vivid daydream? It *couldn't* be real, could it?

Harry saw the flush of desire on Remus's face however, and he knew that it was *very* real.

Beyond the fact that he'd kissed his former professor and his father's last living friend, Harry had *wanted* him.

And amazingly, despite the lack of pheromones dictating his present actions, part of him still did.

The swirl of thoughts was beginning to make Harry's head hurt, and he stood up abruptly on shaky legs.

“Harry—” Remus began, but Harry was quick to cut him off.

“No,” Harry interrupted, and flushed at how breathless he still sounded. “I-I’m not cross with you, but I need some time to think, all right? I just...I need a little space.”

Remus’s shoulders sagged a little as he nodded, and Harry hurried off for the back of the house, which opened up to a small garden patch, an apple tree, and a number of mismatched lawn chairs and toys, along with a square sandbox, which was currently piled high with snow.

Harry used his wand to siphon some of the snow off one of the lawn chairs before he sank down onto it, and gazed up at the cloudy sky. A few snowflakes tickled his nose and disappeared into his hair, but Harry did not feel inclined to rush back inside just yet.

“I don’t even know what I’m doing...” Harry muttered as he bent forward, burying his face in his hands, and he heaved a sigh. Another snowflake hit his cheek, and it melted into a single droplet of water, which tickled along his jaw. His mind was lost in a fog of confusion and mixed feelings, and it was as though he was caught in a whirlwind, but he had no idea how to get out.

But should I be trying to get out? Harry wondered as he looked up again, and touched the newest scar upon his throat. Unlike when Remus had touched it, he felt only the tactile sensation of his fingers brushing over the slightly raised skin, and no electric current of pleasure.

Why is that? Does it only work for Remus, who is my... Or...is it an alpha thing? Harry shivered involuntarily, and abruptly cut off the thought.

Harry eased back in the chair with another heavy sigh. Nothing made sense, and when Teddy got home, he’d have to act like everything was *fine* and that this was okay, and all the rest.

Somehow, that was even more nerve-racking than the idea of being *sexual* with Remus Lupin.

The snow began to pick up, along with the wind, and it forced Harry back inside. It hadn’t been long enough for Harry to come to any conclusions, and when he re-entered the little, cosy house, his mind was still muddled with confused, conflicting thoughts.

The back door of the house led directly into the kitchen and open-concept dining room, all tucked together in a small space, which, curiously, never felt cramped to Harry. On the table was a fluffy white towel, a cup of tea, and a plate of biscuits, along with a short note.

Come talk to me when you’re ready.

The note bore no signature, but Harry knew that it was from Remus.

The biscuits were simple shortbread, half-dipped in milk chocolate, which made Harry think of a crescent moon.

Which, inevitably, led Harry's thoughts back to Remus.

He sighed, ignoring the way his heart seemed to thrum with anticipation at the prospect of *Remus* .

Harry shivered, uncertain which thoughts were his own, and which were this *omega thing* he'd been clued into so recently, and distracted himself as best he could by using the towel to roughly dry his hair, which had been dampened by the snow. He then crammed a biscuit into his mouth, but the dry, sable baked good did little to distract himself from the note that was still clutched in his hand.

Come talk to me when you're ready.

Would he *ever* be ready?

Harry recalled the kiss again, and shivered involuntarily. Already, he wanted to do it again. If nothing else, the man sure as hell knew how to *kiss* .

Harry licked his lips, longing to taste the residual essence of Remus there, but all he tasted was the biscuit he'd bit into.

"Teddy's a lucky kid," Harry said as he balanced a second biscuit in his hand, and stared at it. "To have a dad who can cook...and bake. I always wished I had a dad like that...or a dad at all..."

Harry turned, and arched a brow at Remus, who had been leaning against the frame of the door, and was watching him quietly. His expression of uncertainty gave Harry the impression that he did not know if his presence would be welcomed or not. "Could my dad bake?"

"He grew up spoiled rotten, so not really," Remus replied as his mouth quirked into a small half-smile. "He could manage grilled cheese, eggs, or toast without Lily worrying that he was going to burn the house down, and she was teaching him how to make pasta when you three went into hiding. Sirius was the same—hopeless in the kitchen."

"Is that like...a pureblood thing?" Harry asked as Remus helped himself to a biscuit and reached out with his other hand to gently brush his fingers across Harry's wrist, though if it was an attempt to comfort him, or to cop a feel, Harry wasn't certain. "Not being able to cook, I mean?"

"I think it has more to do with how they grew up," Remus replied, his voice soft and hoarse, and it seemed to be caught somewhere between grief for his lost friends, and a longing to be closer to Harry. "Sirius and your dad both descended from a bloodline that was practically

royalty in the wizarding world. Because of that, they always had more than a few galleons to spare, and houses equipped with house elves, so they never needed to cook or clean.”

“Remus, this is all so...so strange,” Harry said, his despairing tone seeming to break the spell, and the older man took a respectful step back as he seemed to realise that Harry had jumped back to the topic of their present situation, and was no longer referring his father or Sirius. “You’re like an uncle to me, or a second dad, and your son is my godson, and...but then, that...that *kiss*...”

Harry shook his head as he trailed off, and he felt a flush flood his cheeks at the way his voice seemed to squeak at the end, confused, and aroused, and unnerved all at once.

“The kiss was...bad?” Remus asked uncertainly, and Harry snorted.

“Not *quite* the word I’d use, no,” Harry said dryly as he stepped forward. “It was...it was *so* good. But I don’t know if that’s *me* talking, or those pheromones from before.”

“Would it make you feel better or worse if I told you that it’s mostly you for the moment?” Remus asked as Harry stopped in front of him, and he flushed again when Remus reached up to brush a few crumbs from his cheek.

“Honestly? I don’t know,” Harry replied, and laughed weakly. “It’s been a little chaotic, taking this all in, I think I’m still processing everything.”

“Well, I don’t mean to lump more things into that brain of yours, but we do need to discuss what we’re going to say to Teddy when he gets back,” Remus said, his voice soft and smooth, like a gentle, healing balm, and Harry shivered with longing as he tried to focus. Remus was talking about *Teddy*. This was important. He needed to *listen*, not get distracted by Remus's lips, or how inexplicably *good* the alpha smelt.

“Oh God,” Harry murmured as the pieces began to click together, “I have to do the parenting thing now, don’t I? Am I still fun Uncle Harry, or am I like...like...the wicked stepmother?”

Remus threw his head back as he barked a laugh, and Harry scowled at the older man.

“I’m being *serious*!” Harry cried, but it seemed as though Remus could not stop laughing.

“Oh, Harry, I know, but...if you start calling Teddy *Cinderella*, I will not be pleased,” Remus said between chuckles as he slowly calmed down, and when he spotted Harry’s scowl, he brushed his hand across the back of Harry’s arm as though in apology, though Harry’s sour expression did not fade.

“I think you will still be Uncle Harry,” Remus said at last, “I am his father, and no one expects you to do that for me. As to what we might tell him...he is still young, and may not understand everything if we told him that you’re my new mate. I believe that it may be best to simply tell him that you are staying here for a while. As he gets older, of course, we can tell him the truth as he asks about it, but I believe that telling him everything at once may only confuse him.”

“Are you sure that lying to him is the best idea?” Harry asked uncertainly as he eyed Remus, though the older man’s expression did not change. He appeared set in what he planned to tell Teddy. “I mean...what if you say all that and he finds out later that it’s *more* than just me staying here, and he stops trusting you?”

“It will never be as serious as that, Harry,” Remus said reassuringly. “If Teddy asks, *when* Teddy asks, we will of course tell him the truth, but at the moment he still doesn’t quite understand how eggs work or why the sky is blue. Added to that, I sincerely doubt he will question us sharing a bed as anything more than comfort in sleep, given that at the moment he is struggling with nightmares, and crawls into my bed at least four times a week.”

“Oh, poor kid...I didn’t know,” Harry said, an awkward lilt in his voice as he tried to hide his relief—at least with Teddy between them, Remus wouldn’t *expect* anything of him any time soon.

“He won’t talk about them,” Remus said before Harry could ask, “except to say that a *bad man* takes me from him. I have yet to work out if this bad man in his nightmares is Voldemort of some spectre of death, but I think it was foolish of me to tell him why he has no mother so young...he now appears afraid that I will leave him too.”

“Maybe *I’m* the bad man,” Harry mused teasingly, but his laughter died when he saw the horrified look on Remus’s face. “Oh, fuck, Remus, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean—”

“—It’s quite all right, Harry,” Remus said stiffly, though his tone gave Harry the impression that it was *not* all right. “Perhaps having you here will have a calming effect on Teddy, and he will no longer have nightmares. That is my hope, at least.”

“He’s never had nightmares when he’s spent the night at my flat,” Harry mused as the pair of them slowly began to relax, and Remus led Harry from the kitchen and into the sitting room, where they both eased down onto the sofa. Harry began to compulsively lean into Remus’s side for comfort before he knew what he was doing, and quickly shuffled away from him as he tried to work through the torrent of conflicting thoughts in his head. At the same time, Remus had resumed speaking.

“Then perhaps you being here will help him,” Remus mused as he offered Harry a gentle, sweet sort of smile. “I am doing all that I can to tire him out during the day, and make him feel safe and loved here, but perhaps a different sort of influence is what he needs.”

“I can try,” Harry hedged awkwardly. The idea of *parenting* Teddy still a distinctly strange one to him. “What should I do?”

“Just be yourself,” Remus encouraged, reaching out to touch the back of Harry’s neck, and he offered it a light squeeze. “You needn’t do anything special.”

“All right,” Harry replied, smiling faintly at the older man. “I think I can do that.”

Harry was reclined upon the sofa, alone in the sitting room with a cup of tea in his hands when something small and covered in soot flew out of the fireplace at the same speed as a professional racing broom.

Only Harry's quick wandwork stopped Teddy from crashing headfirst into the coffee table, and with an indignant yowl, the tiny kitten that Teddy had been clutching wrenched her way out of the boy's arms and pelted off, leaving a trail of ashy footprints in her wake.

However, Harry's focus was not on the little black kitten, but on Teddy, who had promptly begun to scream bloody murder.

Harry got up, intent to find out what was wrong, but Remus was there in a flash, wrapping one arm around his soot-stained child while the boy continued to positively howl with pain. He was far too distraught to even explain what was wrong as he held out his forearm, and everything became clear when Harry spotted the set of bloody claw marks on Teddy's arm.

"Oh, Teddy, it's all right," Remus said softly as he nudged the scratches with his wand, and they disappeared instantly. He then flicked his wand a few more times to remove the soot and ash from the little boy before he gathered him into a hug, and began to rub his back. "You just scared little Bast, she probably likes using the Floo about as much as you do."

"B-Bath *hates* me!" Teddy wailed as he hugged his father, and Harry cracked a small smile as he watched them together. Regardless what Remus might think of himself, it was quite clear that he was a wonderful father.

"She doesn't hate you, Ted, you just scared her. She'll come back in her own time," Remus reassured him as he lifted the boy off his feet, cradling him as he turned towards the sofa, and offered Harry a small smile. "Didn't you notice who's here? It's your Uncle Harry."

Teddy lifted his little tear-stained face from his father's shoulder, and gazed at Harry as though he'd only just noticed him.

"Uncle H-Harry?" Teddy asked between soft sniffles, and he rubbed a fist over his eyes, though that did little to stem the flow of his streaming tears. "Y-You came to visit?"

Harry glanced to Remus, who offered him an encouraging nod while he stepped over to the sofa to join Harry, and Teddy immediately crawled into Harry's lap, and hooked his little arms around his neck, still sniffing faintly as he tried to calm down from his scare with the cat.

"Er, sort of," Harry said at last while he rubbed Teddy's back gently. "I'm gonna be staying here for a while with you and your dad."

"How would you feel about that, Teddy?" Remus asked, and the boy shrugged a little.

"Okay, I guess," he replied, smiling up at his godfather with a dopey sort of smile, his face still stained with tears. "Like a sleepover?"

“Something like that, yeah,” Harry replied as he squeezed Teddy gently, making the boy giggle. “I’ll be here so long, you’ll probably get sick of me.”

“You means like you’re staying here forever and ever?” Teddy asked, his eyes widening a little, and Harry froze, uncertain whether Teddy’s words were positive or negative, but then his face split into a wide dimpled smile, and he threw himself at Harry in a hug, which made Harry yelp as he fell back into the sofa’s cushions, and Remus chuckled as he watched them.

“I want a sleepover with Daddy and Uncle Harry!” Teddy cried excitedly, and Harry almost cheered along with the tot.

With Teddy between them, there was *no way* anything could happen.

Not tonight, at least.

Bed

Chapter Notes

A/N: This is actually one of my favourite chapters so far, so I hope you guys like it as much as I do! ^.^ Next update will be December 2nd.

Chapter Four – Bed

That evening, Remus insisted on making dinner while Harry kept Teddy occupied.

Teddy drank chocolate milk out of a sippy cup and nibbled on biscuits, while he helped Harry arrange all his stuffed animals into two warring factions, the wolves on one side, and everything else on the other side.

“So the wolves are at war with everyone?” Harry asked as he watched the boy carefully arrange his toys, and he nodded.

“Uh-huh,” he said. “The wolfies are mad ‘cos the owls are ‘fraid of them, and so the wolfies want ‘venge.”

“Venge?” Harry asked, and Teddy nodded. “What’s Venge?”

“Daddy told me about it. He said it was real bad to do, and that I should try not to do it,” Teddy said proudly. “It’s when someone does something bad to you, and you do something bad to them to make them feel bad like you felt bad, and they take your eyes.”

“No eyes, eh?” Harry asked, and Teddy nodded fervently.

“Daddy said...he said...” Teddy trailed off, and screwed his face up as he tried to remember. “First you take an eye, and then that person takes your eye, and then you take their other eye...or something. But it’s *bad*, Uncle Harry. You’re not allowed, Daddy said so.”

Harry just barely managed to swallow a laugh at the boy’s stern tone, and he nodded his head.

“Okay, I promise I won’t do it,” he said, and reached for the chocolatey coffee that Remus had made for him, a Mocha-something-or-other. “So are your wolves the bad guys, then?”

“*Wolfies*, Uncle Harry,” Teddy corrected, and Harry nodded.

“Okay, are your wolfies the bad guys?” Harry asked as he sipped the coffee, then set it aside. Really, it was too sweet for him, but Harry hadn’t the heart to refuse it when Remus had brought it over.

“Uh-uh,” Teddy replied, and shook his head. “They’re mad because no one likes them, and they’re having a coo.”

“They’re doing what?” Harry asked, and grinned a little when Teddy huffed, as though he thought Harry was being stupid on purpose.

“A *coo*, Uncle Harry!” Teddy said. “Daddy said it’s when ‘pressed people have a levelooshun, and make people listen to them.”

“Oh, I see,” Harry said, unable to stifle his chuckle at the sight of a three-year-old telling him that his stuffed animals were orchestrating a *coup*. “Well then, are the wolfies ready to win this coup?”

“Yes, they *have* to win, or else bad things will happen,” Teddy said in a very professorish tone of voice that he’d clearly adopted from his father. “You’s the bad side. And you have to try your hardest, Uncle Harry. You’re not allowed to let the wolfies win because you feel bad.”

“*Dinnertime!*” Remus suddenly called, which made Teddy groan out loud. “I heard that, Teddy, no complaints, now, go wash up!”

“But, Daddy, we’re playing!” Teddy called back, and Remus poked his head out of the kitchen, wearing a tacky *Kiss the Cook* apron over his clothes, and he frowned at his son.

“No buts, Teddy,” Remus admonished. “And no more complaining—go and wash up.”

Still whining and grumbling, Teddy got up and traipsed towards the toilet to wash his hands, while Harry got up and moved towards Remus, who smiled faintly when Harry stopped in front of him.

“Smells good,” Harry offered, and he smiled when the older man’s cheeks flushed a faint pink.

“Thank you, I try.”

Remus’s tone had dropped to an almost husky tone, as though he knew that Harry did not wholly mean the dinner. Remus himself was giving off a scent that made Harry’s newfound instincts seem to hum with desire, and Harry was finding it rather difficult to keep his hands to himself. Only the mental reminder that Teddy was in the next room kept his instincts in check, though a moment later the atmosphere was utterly ruined when Teddy returned to the sitting room, sopping wet from head to toe, with gobs of liquid soap and suds clinging to his shirt and hair.

“Teddy!” Harry burst out while he choked on his laughter. “What on earth happened?”

“I had a whoops,” Teddy replied, his mouth pulled into a frown, “n now I’m *cold*.”

“Serves me right for telling a three-year-old to wash his hands by himself...” Remus muttered under his breath as he pulled his wand out, and waved his son forward. “Come here, Ted, let’s get you all fixed up.”

His bottom lip quivering slightly, Teddy toddled towards his father, who waved his wand and cast the necessary cleaning and drying charms, and Harry watched Teddy’s entire little form relax.

“Next time, Harry or I will go with you, all right, Teddy?” Remus said gently, and the boy nodded his head. “And if I forget, it’s your job to remind us, okay?”

“Okay,” he said, looking down at his feet as he spoke. “’m sorry, Daddy.”

“It’s okay, son,” Remus said as he reached out to ruffle Teddy’s hair gently, making him giggle. “I sometimes forget that you’re a lot like your mother...you’re very good at misbehaving.”

Harry smiled as he watched them, his stomach flip-flopping with unease at the mention of Tonks. It was quite clear in the way that Remus’s eyes softened, and the way that he spoke that he still loved her, and that knowledge made Harry’s heart ache with a confusing mixture of jealousy and guilt.

He did his best to mask this feeling as he followed Remus and Teddy to the round kitchen table, where three place settings had been arranged, with a two jugs in the centre—one of butterbeer, and the other containing pumpkin juice, as well as a steaming casserole dish of chicken pot pie.

“Please, sit, Harry,” Remus offered, along with a gentle brush to the back of Harry’s hand, which only aided in amplifying his confusion over the memory of Tonks, but he nodded mutely, sitting next to Remus while the older man filled each of their glasses and Teddy’s sippy cup, then went about doling out portions of the meal, but not before warning Teddy, “wait a moment, Ted, it’s *very* hot.”

Once Remus had sat down next to Harry, he picked up his fork and speared a piece of pastry and chicken, and blew on it gently. Teddy tried to mimic his father, taking his spoon and scooping up a piece of carrot, but blew so hard on it that it flew directly across the table and collided with Harry’s glasses with an audible *splat!*

Teddy covered his mouth as Harry took his glasses off to clean them, and Remus coughed as though he was trying to cover up his laughter.

“You two, I swear...” Harry said with a small smirk, “it’s not *that* funny...”

As though his words were the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back, Teddy burst out laughing, while Remus chuckled warmly as the tot began to laugh so hard that his face turned a blotchy red. Harry smirked and rolled his eyes, but reigned in the temptation to flick the carrot back to Teddy. Past experience told Harry that that would only lead to a very messy food fight—again.

“Welcome to the family, Harry,” Remus said with a warm smile, and Harry felt his insides squirm pleasantly, while a faint flush bloomed on his cheeks.

After they ate, Remus produced them each a single-serving treacle tart, which Teddy could not say, and kept calling it a “tree-sickle tart” before they all headed to the sitting room with a pot of tea, and Harry sat on the ground again and played with his godson, while Remus looked on with a warm smile.

“Teddy,” Remus said abruptly after he finished off his cup of tea, “five minutes. Put away your toys, please.”

“Aw, but, Daddy!” Teddy protested with the most pitiful whine Harry had ever heard. “Just one long five minutes? *Please?* It’s a company day, so I can stay up longer, can’t I?”

“We told you,” Remus replied firmly, “Harry will be staying for a while, so he’ll still be here when you get up tomorrow morning. Clean up your toys, please.”

With his bottom lip poking out in an exaggerated pout, Teddy got up and gathered up one toy, and began to shuffle towards his toy chest a few feet away. He kept glancing towards his father, as though he hoped Remus might change his mind, but his father crossed his arms, and arched a brow at Teddy.

Harry watched the entire exchange with his bottom lip caught between his teeth as he tried to keep from grinning. Teddy took one toy at a time, and moved at a snail’s pace towards the chest, as though he hoped that going more slowly would somehow lead to him staying up longer.

“Hey, Teddy,” Harry said suddenly, making the boy pause and glance back up. “If you finish putting away your toys more quickly, I’ll do storytime with you tonight.”

“Really?” Teddy asked, his eyes widening a little as though he’d been told he’d won the lottery, and Harry nodded. “Okay!”

With almost comical speed, Harry laughed as he watched Teddy turn into something of a miniature whirlwind, and all of his toys were put away in under sixty seconds. Remus chortled as they watched Teddy race away from the sitting room, and Remus got up with a small groan to follow his son down the hall while he said, “I’ll call you when it’s storytime, Harry.”

“All right,” Harry replied as he forced a small smile, “Will Teddy be sharing the...er, our...my...” he trailed off and flushed, and Remus offered him a sad sort of smile.

“I’ll see what he decides. Usually, he wants to sleep in his own bed first, but if he has a nightmare, he might crawl in with us,” Remus replied in a gentle, patient tone of voice. “Just try to relax, Harry. This is your home too now, and you needn’t put on airs for us.”

Harry nodded, his face still a little red as he watched the older man sweep down the hall, and disappear from sight.

Harry got up from the floor as Remus went to tend to his son, and climbed onto the sofa while he stared at the teapot, debating whether or not to have a cup in an effort to settle his nerves. Rather than tea however, Harry was in the mood for something stronger, though it felt rather odd to just help himself without asking first. Instead, he sat in place, chewing uncertainly on his lower lip while he tried to decide what to do.

This whole day has just been so weird, Harry thought as one of his hands drifted up almost unconsciously to the mark on his throat, and shivered a little. I don't know what I want, or he wants, or anything, and I know I should just stop puttering about and just talk to him like an adult, but what if he hates me being here?

Harry wasn't certain if he was ready hear that.

"Uncle Harry!" a voice called, and Harry glanced up to see Teddy in his pyjamas, fresh out of the bath, and ready for bed. "It's time for stories! You promised!"

"I said, come back here!" Remus suddenly called, and raced out of the hall to grab Teddy by the waist and scoop him up, making the boy shriek with delight. "I still need to dry your hair, you little demon."

"Can you do it while Uncle Harry reads to me?" Teddy asked, "I can also dry it myself by shaking my head..."

"No, no, son," Remus replied with a chuckle while he waved at Harry to follow them, "if you do that, you'll get water everywhere again."

"Water everywhere is not good," Teddy said, and Remus chuckled again as he nodded.

"That's right, Ted," he replied, "one water-related accident per day is all I can handle."

"And I haded one earlier, right, Daddy?" Teddy asked, his face beaming as Remus began to stride back down the hall and towards Teddy's room, while Harry followed behind them.

"That's right, Ted," Remus repeated with a small, adoring smile at his son. "Which means no head-shaking. I'll dry your hair, then Harry can read to you."

"Okay, Daddy!" Teddy said as he craned his neck to look back at Harry, a wide smile still spread across his face. "Uncle Harry, can you read Wolf Prince to me?"

"Of course I can, Ted," Harry replied, and Teddy's smile immediately broadened.

"That's my favourite story!" Teddy chirped happily. "I love it almost as much as sweets!"

Both Harry and Remus laughed at Teddy's antics, while they at last made it to the boy's room.

Teddy's bedroom was simple, but quite clearly teetering between Remus's attempts to keep his son humble, and spoiling him rotten. The bed was dressed in sheets printed with prancing hippogriffs; the single bookcase was stuffed so full of storybooks that most had to be tilted on their side in towering stacks to fit them all; a net suspended from the ceiling in the far corner of the room was crammed full of stuffed animals, and the wooden chest at the end of his bed was stuffed so full of toys that it would no longer close.

Harry smiled as he glanced around the room once, taking in the dark purple walls, the white furniture, and everything else, and how it was so *Teddy*. There were marks on the walls where Remus had repeatedly washed away crayon drawings, there were a few dents and nicks in the flooring from various kid mishaps, scuffs from Teddy's trainers, and a scorch mark that had eaten away the corner of his round, striped rug from an accidental magic incident, which Harry knew had been brought out of him by a nightmare.

Nothing about the space felt like it was someone's spare room; and Harry loved that aspect of it. This wasn't the spare room of another child, like Harry's own first bedroom had been—this was fully and completely Teddy's.

"All right, let's dry that hair," Remus said as he set the boy down, and Harry smiled faintly as the voice drew Harry from his thoughts, and he meandered over to the bookcase to pull out the storybook that Teddy had requested.

As Harry's fingers brushed over the narrow spines, Harry was struck by how oddly *domestic* the entire scene was—Remus drying Teddy's hair and readying him for bed while Harry picked out a storybook, the boy giggling and talking animatedly with his father as he wormed under the covers and hugged his toy bear close. It was hardly the first time that Harry had stayed to read Teddy a bedtime story, and hardly the first time Remus stayed close as he tried to relax the boy before bed, but now it felt distinctly intimate—like they were *both* Teddy's parents getting him ready for bed, and not just Remus.

Harry shook his head a little to dispel the thought as he retrieved the book Teddy wanted. When he turned back around, he saw Teddy curled up in bed, with Remus sitting on the edge while he rubbed the tot's back, and hummed softly, like he used to do when Teddy was a baby.

"Ready for your story, Ted?" Harry asked, doing his best to keep his voice soft and relaxed so that Teddy wouldn't get too excited again.

Teddy smiled and nodded a little, while Harry sat down on the edge of the little bed, and opened the book, though he kept it at an angle where Teddy could see the pictures, and began to read.

"Once upon a time, in a faraway land, there lived a prince.

He was no ordinary prince, but like his father, and grandfather before him, he could change with the moon, for he was a wolf prince, just like all of his subjects..."

Harry made it roughly halfway through the story before Teddy fell asleep, and Remus motioned for Harry to follow him out of the room quietly.

He obeyed, setting the book back on the shelf before he got up and followed Remus into the hall, where the alpha murmured, “thank you for tiring him out today, Harry—usually it takes him *ages* to fall asleep.”

“Er...it’s fine,” Harry replied, not quite sure what else to say, and Remus chuckled warmly as he took Harry’s hand in his own, almost without thinking, and began to lead Harry back towards the sitting room.

Harry tensed, startled by the sudden contact, and he felt his heart clench with guilt when Remus’s smile fell, and he quickly dropped Harry’s hand, as though he’d been burned.

“I’m sorry, Harry,” Remus said, and he sounded as though he meant it. “I wasn’t thinking.”

“It’s all right, Remus,” Harry said, though he didn’t quite feel as though it was all right—in truth, Harry had no idea *what* it was.

“No, it’s not,” Remus replied, as though he’d heard Harry’s thoughts. “This is all so new for you, and I should have asked first.”

Harry opened his mouth to respond, but found that he had absolutely no idea what to say.

They walked back to the sitting room in awkward silence, and Harry sat down on the sofa, uncertain what to do, and watched as Remus passed him by, and headed to the kitchen, where Harry heard the faucet begin to run.

Harry pulled his legs onto the sofa and drew his knees to his chest, finding an odd sense of security in the position while he listened to Remus apparently manually clean the kitchen, though why the man didn’t use magic was a mystery to Harry.

Harry sat, listening quietly, at a loss for what to do with himself. The day had exhausted him, but he was reluctant to actually *go* to bed. Wouldn’t that sound too... *eager* ? He wasn’t sure. He didn’t want to give Remus the wrong idea.

Unfortunately, his indecision had made him even more stressed, and by extension, more tired. Without even realising it, he’d begun to doze on the sofa, and when Remus did at last make an appearance, Harry was roused by the man’s warm chuckle, before his gentle hand carded through Harry’s untidy hair, waking him and making him shiver a little.

“If you were so tired, Harry, why didn’t you just go to bed?” Remus asked gently, and Harry felt his face flush. He tried to form an answer as he gazed somewhat blearily up at the werewolf, but his mouth didn’t seem to want to work, and instead he shrugged feebly, making the older man chuckle again.

“I would assume you mean that you were afraid that you would give me the wrong idea by going to bed, or perhaps maybe you were worried you’d seem too...*eager* by doing so?” Remus asked, arching a brow at him, and Harry felt himself flush again as he nodded feebly.

“Sorry,” he mumbled, “I know you’re not like that, but...all this is so confusing.”

“I know, Harry,” Remus replied, reaching out as though he wanted to touch Harry, but halfway there his fingers curled inwards, and he dropped his arm to his side. “But I promise you that I’d never do something like that without your blessing. We are partners now, and I will admit that I would *like* to do certain things with you, but if you do not feel comfortable with me, then there is no point in doing them. I want you to feel safe and comfortable here, not...*coerced*.”

“Isn’t that sort of moot at this point?” Harry asked, and mentally kicked himself when he saw the stricken look that crossed Remus’s face. Before Harry could even formulate an apology for his stupid remark, Remus’s large and gentle hands were cradling his cheeks, and his lips found Harry’s.

Harry lifted his hands, fully intending to stop Remus before it went too far, but to be kissed like this—as though he was precious, loved, cared for—it was impossible to resist.

Whimpering faintly, Harry coiled his fingers through the front of Remus’s cardigan, and drew him closer.

“You always have a choice, Harry,” Remus murmured softly, his voice thick and husky, like he was just barely holding himself back. “*Always*.”

Harry went to bed, his skin still feeling hot from the kiss, almost uncomfortably so. He changed into a pair of blue and white-striped pyjama bottoms and an old T-shirt, brushed his teeth, checked on Teddy, and after one more moment of hesitation, he slipped into the bed.

The bed smelt of Remus, the scent thick and hot, and it made Harry feel odd that he could smell it so distinctly. Surely a human nose wasn’t *that* acute?

But am I still human? Harry wondered, curling up with his worn-out copy of *Flying With the Cannons*, while he tried to banish the intrusive thoughts. Distantly, he could still hear Remus puttering around the kitchen and sitting room, cleaning the muggle way, though privately Harry thought that Remus, like Harry, was putting off going to bed—despite all Remus’s promises, Harry knew that there were certain connotations irrevocably tied to the concept of going to bed *together*.

Harry heaved a sigh, setting aside the book when he found that he couldn’t focus. Instead, he listened to the soft sounds of Remus puttering around, as though he was trying to keep from joining Harry in bed.

Harry hugged a pillow to his chest; he had no idea how he felt about that.

More than an hour later, Remus seemed to give in to the inevitable, and Harry listened to the older man shuffle down the hall, before he peeked his face in the room, his cheeks pink as he asked, “erm...may I come in?”

“It’s your room,” Harry replied, arching a brow at the older man, who smiled warmly at the remark.

“Not anymore,” he said, stepping inside and circling the bed to retrieve his pyjamas from the wardrobe. “It’s your room too—remember that, Harry. You’re not a guest here; this is your home too. I know it might be foolish of me to insist that you feel comfortable here, but tell me what you need to feel comfortable, and I will do it.”

“Maybe time,” Harry admitted with a small sigh as he watched Remus cross the room again, and pause near the door. Privately, he was relieved that Remus planned to change his clothes elsewhere, instead of right in front of him. “Right now, it still feels very...weird.”

“That’s fair,” Remus replied, nodding his head a little as he smiled sadly at Harry. “I’m sorry that I am the cause of that...should I...perhaps, sleep on the sofa?”

“No,” Harry replied quickly, and Remus arched a brow, making Harry flush at how his objection could be interpreted. “I mean, we should begin as we mean to go on, right? And if you sleep elsewhere, I’ll probably never get over that nervous hump, so I think...I think it’s best that you come to bed as you normally would.”

“*Begin as we mean to go on,*” Remus echoed, and smiled. “Very wise, Harry. All right, then.”

Without another word, Remus stepped from the room, returning a moment later dressed similarly to Harry in a loose T-shirt and plain blue pyjama bottoms.

Harry felt oddly transfixed by Remus as he watched the older man dump his clothes into the hamper, then he circled the bed, pausing at his own side as he caught Harry’s eye, giving him one last chance to redact his offer. Instead, Harry nodded, and to emphasize his consent, he peeled back the covers invitingly.

Remus relented, and slipped into the bed. Harry watched, his eyes falling to Remus’s bare arms, crisscrossed with scars, and his left forearm’s skin badly torn in a clear bite mark. The scar was very old, as though Remus had gotten it in his childhood, and with a sudden jolt, Harry realised that it must be *the* bite that had turned him.

“A gift from Greyback,” Remus said, flexing his arm a little, and making the scar stand out more prominently against the muscle. “He broke my arm in the process, and nearly tore it off. I still can do almost nothing with this hand; my mother panicked and took me to a muggle hospital, but by the time my father convinced her to take me to St. Mungo’s it was too late, and there was irrevocable damage done to my tendons and nerves. I had to re-learn how to write using my right hand.”

“I had no idea,” Harry replied, and felt himself flush a little at how breathless he sounded. Haltingly, he reached for Remus’s hand, and brushed his fingers over the palm of his left hand. “So...you can’t feel this at all?”

“A little,” he admitted, his fingers twitching slightly as Harry touched him, “but certainly not as much as I should.” Remus paused, and offered Harry a small smile. “It still feels nice, though.”

The compliment jarred Harry from his daze, and he jerked his arm back as though he'd been burned. His eyes flitted up to meet Remus's, and his breath caught a little at the small smile he saw upon the older man's face.

"Perhaps it is wrong of me to ask, but...Harry, may I kiss you?" Remus asked, his expression softening a little, as though he was trying to convey that Harry *could* say no if he wanted, while not ruining the mood.

Except...Harry didn't want to say no.

His lower lip caught between his teeth, he nodded faintly, making Remus smile again. The older man reached forward, his fingers brushing across Harry's cheek lightly, almost reverently, before he reached up and gently pulled off Harry's glasses, setting them aside carefully before he leant in and captured Harry's lips in a mind-numbing, toe-curling, electrifying kiss.

Harry whimpered, shivering as he gave over control of the kiss to Remus, *his alpha*. The older man's hand trailed down from his cheek to the side of his throat, his thumb brushing once over Harry's mark, making him moan feebly, a jolt of pleasure lancing through him at the same moment.

Remus pulled back before it could get too intense, and Harry had no idea if that was a good or bad thing. He sank into the pillows, staring up at his mate, his mind fuzzy with both longing and confusion.

"Is this really me feeling these things?" Harry asked softly, "or is it that pheromones thing, like before?"

"Oh, Harry," Remus replied, his voice tender, and he leant in to peck Harry's lips again, "I wish I knew."

The Letter

Chapter Notes

A/N: Surprise early update! Please enjoy :) And thank you guys so, so much for all your support of this story, it's amazing to see. The next update is scheduled for December 16th, and that will be the last update before the holidays. The next one will be January 13th, when Chapter Seven will be posted. I'm really sorry for the huge delay, but I don't have internet at home, and finding time during the holidays to post is a pain, so it's just easier on me to wait it out. Just to reiterate, this will not be the last update before the holidays, the next one is.

Chapter Five – The Letter

“Daddy, watch this!” Teddy chirped, and Harry and Remus watched with dismay as the boy picked up a long strand of spaghetti off his plate, slurped it into his mouth, and after a moment of fumbling and near-gagging noises, they watched as the strand of pasta began to poke out of Teddy’s little nose.

Teddy offered the adults an open-mouth grin as he grabbed both ends, and began to tug them back and forth alternately, as though he was flossing.

“Teddy, that is *disgusting*,” his father said his voice stern, but trembling, as though he was trying very hard to keep from laughing. “Get that spaghetti out of your nose!”

Still giggling, Teddy grabbed the end that hung from his nostril, and slowly tugged it out. Then, to the disgust of the adults, promptly stuck it back in his mouth and ate it.

“And *where* did you learn a trick like that?” Remus asked once Teddy had swallowed, and his little eyes flicked to Harry, making Remus raise his eyebrows accusingly at the omega.

“It seemed the thing to do,” Harry replied defensively, “You’re his dad, meanwhile I can get away with teaching him gross things.”

“Oh, don’t think you won’t pay for that, Harry,” Remus purred, his voice taking on an almost sexual quality, one which Teddy—thankfully—did not seem to notice as he giggled again, and returned to eating his spaghetti normally.

Harry felt himself flushing, and he focused his attention on his own meal as he tried to ignore the way his body almost felt hot from Remus’s words and tone of voice, despite his vain efforts to calm his rapidly beating heart.

In the last few days, it amazed Harry how quickly their relationship seemed to be developing. Remus had reminded Harry time and time again that a large portion of their feelings had to do with the mating mark on Harry's neck, but that had led to a number of less-than-pleasant whispered arguments, instead of the reassurance that Remus had obviously been hoping for.

Harry twirled some of the spaghetti through his fork, a pleasant smile fixed upon his face as he ate, while internally his mind was still lost in turmoil. It was strange how much he *wanted* Remus to admit that there was more going on than just *pheromones*, which was what the older man had kept insisting these feelings were. Unfortunately, it appeared as though Remus was so afraid of accidentally pushing Harry that he had been blinded to the fact that there were some aspects to it that was most certainly not *just* chemical.

I know that it's not just pheromones anymore, Harry thought as he ate. It's probably too soon for it to be love, but it's something, I know that.

Harry helped himself to a slice of cheesy garlic bread, which he used to sop up some of the sauce, then crammed the bread into his mouth, whole. *I just wish Remus could see that too.*

A soft tapping upon the kitchen window drew the trio from their pleasant meal, and when Harry glanced up, he tensed when he saw an official-looking Ministry owl sitting upon the sill.

Remus paused to wipe his hands on his napkin before he reached out to touch Harry's arm in silent reassurance. Without a word, he got up and headed over to the window to accept the letter from the owl, and rewarded it with a treat before it flew off again.

Harry watched Remus silently, Teddy blissfully ignorant to the tense atmosphere of the room, while the older man slit the envelope and tugged the letter out. Immediately, his concerned frown became more pronounced, and Harry felt his stomach clench with nervousness.

Remus didn't say what the letter contained, but instead quietly passed it to Harry to read.

Dear Mr Lupin,

We have received your claim notice, and per the regulations of the Omega Protections Office, an inspection will be conducted at your place of residence within one week of the receipt of this letter, 17th February.

This inspection will be to ensure that the omega in question, Harry James Potter, has been Marked and Mated, and if a Heat has passed in that time, he must also be with child, in accordance with the Magical Blood Population Act of 1634.

The inspector will be at your residence at 11AM exactly, and all family members must be present, including any children.

Sincerely,

Amadeus Perch

Omega Protections Officer

Harry wanted to curse, but only Teddy's presence at the table kept him quiet.

"We'll talk about this later," Remus murmured as Harry passed the letter back to him, and Harry nodded silently, his appetite suddenly gone.

~*~

It was a tense few hours for Harry as he pretended that everything was fine while he was in Teddy's presence. He and Remus watched the boy play with Bastet, who followed Teddy around dutifully, almost like a purring guard dog. She would run after toys Teddy threw for her and occasionally brought them back, which Harry found rather miraculous, given that he'd never seen a cat play fetch before.

Regardless of how sweet the scene was, Harry still found it hard to fully relax, when the implications of the letter they'd received hung over their heads like some sort of guillotine, and Harry fidgeted with nervousness.

At seven o'clock, Remus transported Teddy to bed. While Remus attended to his son, Harry fell into their usual evening ritual that they'd constructed over the last few days.

Harry got up and cleared away any toys Teddy had missed, then he headed to the kitchen to prepare an evening pot of tea for himself and Remus. Often, Harry opened the window to listen to the nighttime sounds around them, given how close they were to the woods, but tonight Harry was still lost in a haze of nerves brought on by the letter, and kept the windows shut.

It's just as well, Harry thought as he set a few biscuits onto a plate next to the teacups, *since it's snowing again.*

Harry glanced to the window, and smiled weakly as he watched the fluffy flakes drift past the window, his eyes drawn to the woods, where he spotted a few deer near the treeline—a stag and a doe.

Almost like Mum and Dad are trying to tell me that everything will be okay, Harry thought, smiling a little at the sight of the two animals, and almost laughed aloud at the silly musing.

Harry heard Remus step into the kitchen, but he couldn't quite pull his eyes away from the deer. They disappeared into the woods just as Remus stepped up behind him, and Harry

shivered involuntarily as Remus's arm slid across his lower back in a familiar, pleasant touch.

"I don't mean to rush you," Remus said softly, and almost apologetically. "But we really should talk about the letter."

Remus's lips brushed Harry's cheekbone, almost as though he couldn't help himself, and Harry turned to kiss him properly. Remus might feel as though it was only chemicals dictating Harry's actions, but he'd be damned if he'd deprive himself of Remus's intoxicating kisses just because the alpha was afraid of pushing him.

"I know," Harry replied at last while he pulled away reluctantly. "I just...I don't really want to."

"I can understand that," Remus replied, moving in for another tender kiss, his arms once more slipping around Harry's waist to draw him closer before he continued to speak, his words whispered across Harry's lips gently. "But this isn't one of those things that will just disappear if we ignore it. We have a little over a week until the Ministry official shows up, and in our current state, they would be well within their rights to take you away from me."

Harry's arms tensed around Remus, and the older man smiled, as though he was pleased by the reaction.

"Exactly," he continued, moving to press a kiss to Harry's temple. "Come on, let's get this over with."

"All right," Harry replied, sighing in defeat as he flicked his wand at the tea tray, and it followed them out of the kitchen and into the sitting room, where the letter was laid out on the coffee table, as though Remus wanted to ensure that they wouldn't get distracted from their *talk*.

Remus sat down first, and as Harry settled in next to him. Remus leant forward to prepare the tea—Harry's he poured straight, while his own he drowned in milk and sugar. Harry did his best not to gag as he counted Remus's five teaspoons of sugar.

"Here," Remus said, offering Harry his own cup, which he accepted with a small nod of thanks, and Remus got straight to the point. "Is there anything you think we should do—or *prefer* we do, concerning this letter, Harry?"

"It's sort of black-and-white, isn't it?" Harry asked uncertainly, "I mean, my h-heats are still a little unpredictable because I presented so recently, and they said we need to have sex before they show up, which gives us a week. Do I really need to have a kid so soon? I thought we'd have more time to decide on that."

Despite how rushed and jumbled his words were, Remus did not appear in any way bothered by it. Instead, he sipped his very sweet tea, his expression thoughtful, and he took several long moments to think before he finally answered his mate.

"I will admit the reference to children was a surprise," Remus said, his lips twitching into a small frown. "They don't often enforce that act—our population is stable, or so I thought,

though after the war it is possible that it is less stable than I imagined, or, more likely, it is Lucius's doing—perhaps a manipulation to give the official an excuse to take you from me.”

“That sounds like Lucius,” Harry grumbled, shivering at the thought of that foul man coming anywhere *near* him. “What can we do? I enjoy my time with you, I do, but I’m not sure if I’m ready for sex yet...”

“The legal jargon of the mating between an alpha and omega is fairly vague,” Remus said, pausing again to sip his tea. “I think we can get away with something non-penetrative, without worry that that will set off any alarm bells at the Ministry. I will double-check to be certain, I don’t want to do anything on guesswork alone, but as I recall, as long as we both orgasm either at the same time, or relatively close together, it will suffice.”

“So...we could both just...” Harry felt his face flush, and he hid behind his teacup. “Just...wank and that’d be that?”

“Ah, well, no,” Remus replied, and offered Harry an apologetic smile. “The inspection spells that are employed would sense a deception like that. We would have to be a little more...*involved*. How would you feel about that?”

“Nervous, if I’m being honest,” Harry said, and laughed weakly. “But...I trust you. If you shag even *close* to how you kiss...” Harry trailed off, and felt himself turn even redder when he’d realised what he’d just said. “I mean...I just...I trust you.”

“I don’t like this, Harry,” Remus said, his tone surprisingly firm as he set down his tea on the table, hard enough that some of the drink sloshed over the sides of the cup and pooled at the bottom of the saucer.

“I figured as much,” Harry replied, his shoulders sagging a little in disappointment. “I mean after T—er, I mean, I just know you like women, is all.”

Harry had expected Remus to agree, or maybe laugh bitterly in response to Harry's remark.

What he had not expected however, was for Remus to laugh.

“Oh, Harry,” Remus said between bouts of laughter, his hand coming up to his mouth in an effort to stifle it, though his shoulders continued to quake with mirth. “While I *do* enjoy the company of women, I do not *only* enjoy the company of women.”

“Oh,” Harry said, and blinked bemusedly at the older man. “Wait, what?”

“What I mean is that I like both men *and* women—I am bisexual,” Remus explained patiently, finally calming down, and he offered Harry a small, warm smile that seemed to set loose a dozen butterflies in Harry's chest. “What I meant is I don't like how the Ministry is twisting our arms and dictating our relationship. You have a *lovely* shape, and I feel no disgust whatsoever at the idea of taking you to bed, but I wanted that decision to be on *your* terms, not those of the Ministry.”

“Oh,” Harry said again, and he felt his face flush red once more. “Well, that's good...I...I think?”

“How about this,” Remus proposed, reaching forward for one of Harry's hands, but paused just before he touched him, and glanced up, silently asking for permission. Harry nodded at once, and Remus took one of Harry's hands between both of his own. “The inspection is on the seventeenth, and we have a full week to prepare. Saturday is Valentine's Day...how about I leave Teddy with Andromeda for a sleepover, and we go out for a real date, something...*romantic*. And we'll see how the night goes?”

“How it goes?” Harry asked weakly, not quite understanding what Remus was getting at.

“We'll do everything right,” Remus said, his voice tender and questioning, once more implying that Harry could refuse if he wanted to. “We'll have a romantic dinner, maybe some dancing, if you're so inclined, then we'll come back here and go as far as you feel comfortable with. I won't push, Harry, I promise—I won't do something like that to you. You'd be in charge of our activities together, and if you say stop, we'll stop.”

“I like that,” Harry said, chewing on the side of his lip as he mulled it over, realising too late that his acceptance of Remus's proposal had jumped from his mouth alarmingly fast.

What does that mean? Harry wondered, both nervous and curious by what Remus had suggested, but pushed it from his mind for now—there would be time enough to dwell on it later.

“But...what if we do all this, get into bed, and I freak out?” Harry asked uncertainly, “I mean, given our short window, maybe we should...erm...*practice* first?”

“Practice?” Remus asked, arching a brow at him. “What sort of practice?”

“I don't know,” Harry said with a small groan, and fell back against the sofa dramatically, making Remus chortle softly. “I haven't been with that many people, and this is sort of...*big* for me. It'd be nice to know that if we go forward with your plan that I won't freeze up partway through, you know?”

“Well...” Remus said, his voice dropping to a soft purr as he gently pried Harry's teacup from his grasp, setting it aside before he rested one of his hands on Harry's knee. Remus slid the limb halfway up his thigh, then offered it a small squeeze, making Harry gasp. “While I am fairly confident in my abilities and endowments, is there something in particular that you're nervous about?”

“Endow—wait, how confident is *confident*?” Harry asked nervously, and Remus responded with an enigmatic smile. “No, no, I need to know this one.”

“Really?” Remus asked, inching a little closer to Harry, and Harry felt his breath catch when Remus's hands slipped higher up his thighs, just shy of his groin. Harry felt Remus's hands tense against the fabric of his jeans, though it was less like he was deliberately trying to grip him tighter, and more like he was trying to force himself to stop. “Are you *that* curious about my size?”

“Well I am *now*,” Harry retorted, and the older man chuckled. “I just assumed you'd be an average-sized bloke, not someone on the side of terrifyingly enormous.”

“*Terrifyingly enormous?*” Remus asked, arching a brow at Harry. “Should I be flattered or offended by that particular statement?”

“Maybe both?” Harry asked, his voice squeaking a little. “I'm sorry, I don't mean it in a bad way, I just...I don't know what to expect, and when you say stuff like *I am fairly confident about my endowments*...it makes me wonder, that's all.”

Remus was quiet for a while, easing back from Harry to return his personal space to him, while he rested a hand under his chin, his expression thoughtful.

“How do you think we should proceed, Harry?” Remus asked, “what would help put your mind at ease? I can tell you that I have never hurt a partner before, and I am not as large as you are probably envisioning. When I said that, I meant only to imply that I have never gotten any complaints before about my size one way or the other, nor, as I said, have I ever hurt someone.”

“I don't know how to go ahead with this,” Harry admitted, his voice adopting something close to a whine of despair, and Remus smiled at him warmly, perhaps in what he hoped was reassurance.

The alpha leant in, and brushed Harry's lips lightly with his own. Harry shivered, wanting to draw out the kiss, but Remus ended it before Harry was able to.

“Come to bed, Harry,” Remus murmured encouragingly, his voice once more adopting a slightly husky tone that hinted very strongly that he did not merely intend for them to just sleep tonight. “Nothing will happen that you do not want it to; if you say stop, I will stop, and if you are uncomfortable, I promise that all we will do is sleep, but...I wish to dip our toes into the shallow end, so to speak, tonight, if that is all right with you.”

“I...” Harry trailed off, his heart thrumming in his chest with anticipation, his breath caught in his throat, but despite his reservations, part of him *longed* to say yes.

“I'm...” Harry tried again, but still his voice refused to cooperate with him. Remus offered him a sweet smile, and kissed him gently, once more transporting Harry to a state of near-bliss, and he let out a small, needy moan of longing.

“We will go to bed,” Remus said, his voice soft and plaintive, as though he was once more implying that if Harry was uncertain, nothing would happen at all. “And see where the night takes us. If you decide that the night will take us nowhere, then that is all right too. I want this to be on *your terms*, Harry, not mine.”

The firm tone with which Remus spoke was startling, and yet somehow strangely comforting. Knowing that Remus was doing all that he could to give Harry back the reins of his life, so to speak, was comforting, and it made Harry smile.

“Can we...” Harry trailed off, and leant in to kiss Remus. It felt odd to take the lead, and he was certainly not as practised at snogging as Remus was, but that didn't seem to matter—kissing Remus felt *good*, and *right*.

“Can we...?” Remus prompted, reminding Harry that he'd started to speak, then forgot to continue.

“Oh, right,” Harry said, and flushed again. “Er...can we just go to bed like regular, but sleep without...without shirts? Like...like *not* regular. And...maybe...snog...a bit?”

Harry felt his face colour again, but this time from the horribly awkward phrasing of his suggestion. It sounded so stupid and juvenile compared to Remus, who was older, and kissed really well, and knew about books and things.

“Is that what you want to do, Harry?” Remus asked, his voice soft as he reached out to stroke Harry's hair, and his eyelids fluttered at the delicious sensation.

“Er...yes?” Harry asked, gazing up at Remus as he tried to gauge the older man's reaction to his suggestion, but Remus's face was frustratingly blank. “I mean, I think so?”

Remus smiled, a warm, comforting smile that felt like *home* and *family* and *safety* all rolled into one. It made Harry want to slip inside Remus's skin, and never leave.

Remus leant in again, cradling Harry's chin gently in his hand, and kissed him tenderly. His skin tickled where Remus touched him, and when his hand trailed down his throat to his mating mark, the alpha's thumb brushing over it lightly, but pointedly, Harry let out a soft, almost needy moan as pleasure coursed through him at the light touch.

“When we go to bed, may I touch you, Harry?” Remus murmured against his lips, before he drew Harry into another intoxicating kiss, pulling him a little closer, but taking note of when Harry tensed, and immediately stopped his physical coaxing. “May I taste your sweet skin, make it pebble with gooseflesh, make you feel better than you ever have?”

Harry moaned his assent, relaxing and allowing Remus to draw him into the older man's lap. He braced his knobbly knees on either side of Remus's narrow hips, and Harry shivered when he felt the outline of an erection press into his groin. It felt slightly larger than the last time, making Harry think that maybe Remus had been only half-hard the last time he'd felt it, and not fully hard. He kissed Harry again, sucking the omega's bottom lip into his mouth, making Harry moan again, and yet all the while his hands remained respectfully above his waist despite his obvious want for more.

“I—I thought the plan was to go to bed first?” Harry panted between desperate kisses, and whimpered, rolling his hips almost unconsciously, and he felt Remus shudder under him.

“Oh, Harry, I'm sorry,” Remus murmured as he swiped his tongue across Harry's lower lip, and Harry immediately opened his mouth to admit him. “You just...smell so good...”

Remus canted his hips, seemingly on instinct rather than rational thought, and Harry hissed when he felt their clothed erections grind together.

“We...we...need to stop,” Remus panted, though despite his feeble protest, it sounded as though he *really* didn't want to.

“Do we have to?” Harry whined, shivering a little as he tried to resist the temptation to grind into Remus again. “When you get aroused...you smell like...like...” Harry flushed, but couldn't bring himself to say it.

You smell like home.

Harry buried his face in the crook of Remus's neck, where the scent was strongest, and Remus hummed, the sound almost a purr, while he reached up to pet Harry's hair, neither stopping nor encouraging his actions.

“My alpha scent will naturally calm you, especially now that we have mated,” Remus murmured, his words thick and halting, as though he wasn't certain whether or not Harry wanted to know. “If you ever feel stressed, you can always ask to scent me, Harry, and I will never refuse you.”

“I feel so lucky,” Harry whispered against his skin, enjoying the scent, it cascading over him like a waterfall, and with it came the sensation of *happy alpha. Content alpha. Safety. Home.*

Everything Harry could ever wish for in a partner, Remus was.

And Harry could feel, in the very depths of his heart, how easily he could fall in love with this man.

Despite all the complications of their relationship however, in this, Harry had no desire to talk himself out of it. He wanted that love, and like his own feelings, he could all but feel Remus's in the way he smelled—if Harry gave Remus his heart, Harry knew that it would be kept safe.

Harry nuzzled at Remus's neck experimentally, and the older man chuckled warmly, his hold on Harry tightening incrementally.

Harry didn't quite know where all these thoughts and feelings were coming from, and part of him knew that it was too fast, and likely too soon.

Mostly, he didn't care.

Mostly, he just wanted even a sliver of what Remus was offering.

“I still don't know if this is fully me,” Harry warned, his voice quavering on the edge between arousal and nervousness. “I don't know if it's me or—or these *pheromone* things...”

“I don't want you to push yourself, Harry,” Remus said gently, shifting to tilt Harry's head up using his fingertips, and he brushed the omega's lips in a featherlight kiss. “All of this has been very stressful—more for you than me. We don't have to do anything at all if you are feeling in any way uncertain.”

“Maybe before the inspection, I should...I dunno...maybe take a breather?” Harry asked uncertainly, “Go visit Ron and Hermione, or go to Hogsmeade or something...clear my head?”

Harry did not miss how Remus seemed to tense up at that suggestion, but at the same time, he seemed to be trying to resist the urge to protest. In a way, it was almost comforting—it told Harry that despite whatever his alpha or werewolf instincts were telling him to do, he didn't want to give in to them and restrict Harry in any way, shape, or form.

“Go see your friends this week,” Remus said at last, his tone encouraging. “Do whatever you need to do in order to feel safe and secure.”

Harry leant in to kiss him, feeling as though a great weight had been lifted off his shoulders in that moment. Remus held onto him, his touch almost desperate, as though he was afraid that Harry might suddenly vanish.

“If it makes you feel any better,” Remus murmured hoarsely, “I too often cannot tell the difference between what is real, and what is instinct, Harry. I think this is too new to fully trust ourselves, and as I have said before, the Ministry is dictating our relationship far too much for my liking. I wish we could take this at a more natural pace, or not at all, so that you might have the luxury of choosing your own partner...”

“What if I choose you?” Harry asked, and Remus chuckled, kissing him once, though to Harry the action seemed placating, as though he didn't wholly believe Harry's sentiment.

“Come to bed, Harry,” Remus said softly, almost pleadingly. “Perhaps tomorrow we can begin this *practice* before we need to...”

Remus trailed off, and shook his head. He sounded reluctant, but in a way that told Harry that it had less to do with his feelings towards intimacy with Harry itself, and more as though he feared pushing Harry too far, too soon.

Instead of answering straightaway, Harry pressed a lingering kiss to Remus's lips, one hand moving to cradle the older man's cheek, and he ran his fingers lightly over the soft, short hairs of Remus's close-cropped facial hair.

“Bed sounds good,” Harry replied, just as softly, and kissed him again. “I think we could both do with some relaxation after today...but I wouldn't mind if we still the shirts-off-snogging-thing.”

Remus huffed a laugh as Harry got up, and reached for Remus's hand. Remus let him take it, as though in some sort of love-struck daze, and allowed Harry to lead him to their room.

Romance

Chapter Notes

A/N: This will be the last pre-holiday update. The next one is scheduled for January 13th. All of you guys have a safe and happy holiday and I'll see you all in the new year! :)

Chapter Six – Romance

Harry woke on Valentine's day with an easy, placid smile upon his face.

In fact, it was a smile quite reminiscent of the kind that Remus often bore, and Harry almost laughed at the similarity.

The only thing that stopped his laughter short was the lips pressed into his own, and the red rose that was tickling its petals along his sternum, like he'd been somehow transported into a romantic film, complete with every cliché imaginable.

“Remus...” Harry breathed, one hand moving to cradle his cheek, while he drew the older man in for another kiss, which he seemed all too happy to return.

“Happy Valentine's Day,” Remus said, and Harry almost laughed.

Happy was indeed the word for it, after the week they'd had, and as Harry's mind drifted to the past four days, he could not help but smile.

~*~

The first night following Harry's timid suggestion, oddly, he felt no awkwardness as he divested himself of his shirt and slid into bed, but it was a wildly different story when Remus finally joined him.

Remus had taken a little longer, as he always did, puttering around the kitchen and cleaning up in a very muggle-like fashion before he finally chose to come to bed.

When Remus at last stepped into the room Harry's breath hitched in both nervousness and anticipation, but the alpha did nothing out of the ordinary. He grabbed his pyjamas, and

stepped back out, as he always did, never once glancing at Harry as he did so.

This act left Harry feeling slightly put-out, as he didn't know whether Remus simply hadn't thought to look at him while he grabbed his nightclothes, or if he didn't want to look at Harry, which stung deeply.

Remus returned to the room a moment later, appearing uncharacteristically shy as he gazed at Harry in the bed, his eyes wide with wonder, as though he was gazing at something beautiful.

Harry flushed, and dropped his gaze.

He listened to the older man edge farther into the room, curiously dressed in his usual nighttime garb of a T-shirt and pyjama bottoms, and Harry fidgeted in place. Did Remus think his proposal had been stupid, or childish? Was that why he hadn't come to bed in the manner Harry had asked?

Harry listened to Remus step closer to the bed, until he slid into his usual spot, and hooked a finger under Harry's chin, compelling him to look up at the older man, who was smiling at him with warm adoration.

"You...didn't take your shirt off," Harry said as he flushed, feeling monumentally stupid.

"I rarely disrobe for anyone, Harry," Remus said softly, "I do not like my body, and years upon years of my...other form abusing it has not been kind to me. You asked that we kiss with fewer clothes, and I wish to honour that, but I also wish to impart on you that this is difficult for me."

"Are you afraid that I won't want to be near you anymore if I see...whatever it is?" Harry asked, "because that won't happen. I don't care what you look like; you're still Remus."

Remus smiled sadly, as though he didn't believe him, and slowly he reached down to grip the hem of his shirt, and pulled it off in one fluid movement.

As Harry gazed at him, he found that he had no idea what Remus was so ashamed of. His skin was heavily scarred, sagged a little with age, but still looked strong. His body hair was sparse, collecting in a mixture of sandy blond and grey just below his navel, before it disappeared into the top of his pyjama bottoms.

Harry reached out to touch him, and stopped, recalling all the times that Remus had asked permission before touching him, and refused to not allow the older man the same courtesy.

He looked up, and Remus smiled weakly as he nodded, though his expression was still guarded, as though he was waiting for a rejection.

Harry pressed his palm to the centre of Remus's chest, the tips of his fingers landing over his heart, and Harry was almost certain that he could feel the alpha's heartbeat speed up.

"You're beautiful, Remus," Harry murmured, awe in his voice.

“You don't need to lie for my benefit, Harry,” Remus replied with a soft, almost sad smile.

“I'm not,” Harry insisted as he shifted closer, until their chests were almost touching. “You're beautiful, Remus.”

Harry kissed him to emphasize his point. Truly, he thought Remus was lovely to look at, and it made his heart ache that Remus did not seem to believe it.

Remus kissed him back, a strong arm winding around Harry's waist and drawing him closer, while their mouths opened and they tasted each other enthusiastically. Harry almost wanted to weep from how good it all felt.

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The second night, Harry and Remus went to bed much earlier than they normally would have, dressing in the same manner as the night before. Once more Harry told Remus that he thought he was beautiful, and once more it seemed as though Remus thought he was only saying it for his benefit.

“Turn around, Harry,” Remus instructed, his hands falling to Harry's waist, and Harry eagerly obeyed.

“I don't like this position,” Harry complained almost at once, and Remus froze.

“Why not?”

“It's impossible to kiss you like this,” Harry replied, and smiled when he felt Remus quiver with laughter.

“Sit still and behave yourself, if such a thing is possible,” Remus teased, and Harry grinned again, though it shifted quickly to a tiny gasp of surprise when Remus's lips fell to the side of Harry's throat, and kissed him there.

One arm tightened around Harry's waist, while the other pressed to his abdomen, and trailed slowly up his chest, before it stopped just below his collarbone. Remus kissed his neck again, and Harry shivered as he felt Remus's fingers press into his mating mark at the same moment.

Harry gasped again, this one more deep, and was quickly followed by a soft groan of pleasure. The simple touch seemed to shoot straight to his groin, and Harry trembled as he squirmed in Remus's hold, uncertain whether he wanted Remus's kiss or his touch more.

“Feel good, Harry?”

Harry nodded weakly, fairly sure that his voice was not up to working at the moment, and Remus responded with a soft, amused chuckle. He pressed his fingers against Harry's mark

again, a little harder this time, and Harry whimpered as his hips jerked involuntarily, while Remus traced the side of Harry's neck with his tongue.

"Soon, Harry," Remus promised softly. "Soon...my precious Harry."

Harry turned, and buried himself in Remus's embrace.

~*~

"What is the plan for tonight, Harry?" Remus asked, his voice light and teasing as they lay in bed, Remus tracing the lines of his chest, making the muscles twitch pleasantly while Harry laughed softly.

"How long are you planning on keeping this up, exactly?"

"Keeping what up?"

"This whole Harry in Charge business," Harry explained, and Remus raised his eyebrows at him in confusion.

"I had no idea there was a deadline," Remus replied, and Harry scoffed, but Remus interrupted before he could say anything. "No, I'm serious, Harry. Whatever gave you the idea what I would abruptly change and act as though your opinion on what we do has no bearing?"

Harry shifted uncomfortably, but didn't answer. Remus frowned, and leant in to kiss Harry lightly.

"I cannot recall if I have said this so plainly, but Harry, I will never force you to do anything you do not wish to do. If you are uncomfortable or distressed with what we are doing, why would we do them? I care for you, I have cared for you both before and after this whole claim business began, albeit in different ways. My priority has always been your happiness, not your misery."

"I'm sorry," Harry said as he shifted closer and pressed his head against Remus's bare shoulder, who now seemed more willing to disrobe in front of Harry than he had been even a few days before. "All of this is still pretty new to me, and from what I've read...well...it seems as though most of the wizarding world does not hold omegas in very high regard."

"I am not the wizarding world," Remus reminded him, his voice soft and reassuring as he petted Harry's hair gently. "I know how most of the world sees your secondary gender, but I do not. You are still the strong, independent, and able-bodied young man you have always been. Your status as an omega does not change that."

Harry felt a lump form in his throat from Remus's heartfelt words, and he turned a little, just enough to kiss him, and gazed down into the older man's beautiful, honey-coloured eyes. He

was trapped by them, like a deer in headlights, and for a moment, he lost his will to speak. It took him far longer than normal to shake himself out of it and finally formulate a response.

“Tonight...would you just hold me?” Harry asked in a small, almost shy tone of voice, and Remus arched up to kiss him gently.

“Anything you want, Harry.”

~*~

“Lie on your stomach, Harry,” Remus instructed gently on their fourth night of experimentation.

“I thought I was in charge,” Harry teased, grinning, and Remus chuckled as he leant in to capture Harry's lips in a tender kiss.

“Oh, you are, but I have something special planned for you tonight. I promise that you will enjoy yourself, but if you decide we need to stop, just tell me.”

“I trust you, Remus,” Harry replied, smiling faintly, and he leant in to press a gentle kiss to Remus's lips before he laid down and rolled over, exposing his bare back to the alpha.

Harry pillowed his head on his arms, and closed his eyes as he listened to Remus putter about on his night table before he returned his attention to Harry, gently sliding his glasses off his face and setting them aside before he felt something cold trickle onto his back, and he gasped in understanding.

Massage oil.

Harry smiled to himself as he suddenly realised what Remus had planned, and he let out a tiny moan as Remus's large hands came down upon his back, gently rubbing the sweet smelling oil into his skin with slow, steady strokes.

“Feel good?” Remus purred in his ear, and Harry nodded as Remus's hands slid farther up his spine and to his shoulders.

“Really good,” Harry replied, groaning again. “You are so good with your hands...”

Remus chuckled, but did not answer. His hands moved back down Harry's spine, rubbing in tender, firm circles, and reducing Harry's entire body to jelly.

Remus slowed to a stop at the elastic waistband of Harry's pyjama bottoms as he said, “may I?” and Harry's eyes snapped open, as though he'd been forcibly jerked from a delightful daydream. “It's all right to say no, Harry,” Remus added in a rush, “I won't be upset—”

“—but you want to, don't you?” Harry interrupted, remaining still upon the bed, and he felt Remus sag as though in defeat.

“Yes, Harry,” he replied softly, “I do.”

“Go on, then,” Harry said, turning a little to smile at Remus. “Please?”

“Harry, are you sure?”

“Not in the slightest,” Harry replied, laughing a little. “But we'll never get over that hump, so to speak, unless we try...right?”

“Right,” Remus agreed, laughing weakly as Harry settled down again, and Remus laid his hands on him, rubbing in the same slow, steady circles as before, but this time his fingers dipped below the elastic, and Harry shivered a little, but did not openly protest.

Apparently encouraged by Harry's reaction, Remus slowly and gently, pulled the back of Harry's pyjama bottoms down, until his whole arse was exposed, but his cock was still clothed. It was both an odd sensation and a pleasant one—despite his bodily reactions to Remus's expert hands, Harry wasn't certain if he was completely ready to expose himself to Remus.

Remus pressed a tender kiss to the base of Harry's spine, so light in fact that Harry half-wondered if he'd imagined it. Remus pressed his hands over Harry's arse, cupping it, and he offered the globes of flesh a tender squeeze.

Harry gasped, both startled and aroused by the sensation, in particular when Remus began to massage them, as though it was any other area of his body, and not a place so intimate.

Remus rubbed them, massaged the oil into his skin, but never once did he try to delve deeper, or go further, as though he knew that Harry was not ready for more. Soon, he pulled his pyjamas back up, and lay down next to Harry, coaxing him into a tender kiss as he was once again reminded to whom he was mated—Remus Lupin. A good man.

~*~

Over breakfast, Teddy was practically bouncing in his chair with excitement at the night ahead of him.

“Gran said we can go for ice-creams and chocolates, and she promised tomorrow morning to make her famous omelettes. With *cheese*.”

“What else are you doing that's not food-related?” Harry teased, but the remark seemed to go over Teddy's head as Remus brought over breakfast, and began to serve up eggs, bacon, and toast, topped off with a little heart-shaped chocolate for Harry and Teddy, making Teddy squeak with delight, and Harry flush at the attention.

“No singing valentines, please,” Harry muttered, and Remus huffed a laugh while Teddy enthusiastically tore into his chocolate, and crammed it into his mouth.

“Daddy!” Teddy said thickly around the chocolate, “there's *camels* in it!”

“Camels?” Harry asked, perplexed, while Remus chuckled.

“Caramel,” he explained under his breath, “yours is just a dark chocolate truffle—I know that you're not overly fond of sweet things, except treacle tart, apparently.”

Harry smiled gratefully, and ate the chocolate first. To his pleasure, he saw Remus beam at him, as though thrilled that Harry had accepted the small token of affection.

The chocolate was exactly the kind he'd grown to like in recent years—sharp dark chocolate, but sweet with a soft, creamy centre.

Under the table, Harry reached for Remus's hand, and offered it a gentle squeeze before the trio began to dig into their breakfasts.

Harry thought back to those nights of practice again, and the days that had followed. Remus was always so tender and caring, like Harry was a china doll that he was petrified of breaking.

Part of Harry balked at Remus's delicate treatment of him—Remus more than anyone should know that he wasn't weak.

However, a greater part of him revelled in it. Remus asked for permission and Harry's consent to their activities constantly, almost to the point of annoyance, whether he was okay with what they were doing, if he was comfortable, and if he wanted to stop. He never did, and Remus likely knew it, but it did not stop him from asking again and again, as though he was determined that Harry have control over how fast or how slow their physical relationship went, despite the Ministry's meddling.

Far from feel uncomfortable with the proceedings however, Harry was surprised at how much he was looking forward to the eve of Valentines Day, in particular the *sex* part.

Now, if they went past Remus's proposal of frottage, Harry had a feeling he wouldn't protest.

Fairly certain, that is.

The day passed slowly, and Harry was quite keen to rush Teddy off to his Gran's for the evening. Remus did not fail to notice, and smiled at him warmly whenever Harry caught his eye, and thankfully he did not appear offended by Harry's keenness. They'd both been careful with shows of affection in front of Teddy, though sometimes Teddy would catch them holding hands or standing just a *little* too close to one another, though as of yet, the young boy had yet to remark on it.

~*~

When evening did at last come, Harry was holding back laughter as he stood with Remus and Teddy in front of the fire, his bottom lip poked out and tears in his eyes while he gently tried to convince the tot to put his cat down.

“B-But Bath *has* to come!” Teddy protested tearfully. “I want to play with her!”

“Last time we took Bastet through the Floo, she did not like it one bit,” Remus reminded Teddy gently as he knelt in front of his son, and rubbed his back soothingly. “I know you want to take her with you, but it wouldn't be fair to her to make her go through the Floo, and I promise that Harry and I will keep her company while you're with your Gran.”

“You promise? She won't be lonely without me?” Teddy asked, his wide, teary eyes shifting from his father to Harry and back again, while Bastet meowed and squirmed in Teddy's arms, as though she was trying to emphasize the point that Remus was making.

“We'll keep her company Teddy, we promise,” Harry said with a small, reassuring smile.

“And you know your dad never breaks promises.”

“And neither does Harry,” Remus added, smiling with approval as he glanced at Harry out of the corner of his eye, making him flush. “Now come on, let's put Bast down so that we can get you to your Gran's.”

Teddy nodded, sniffing a little as he set the squirming cat down, and immediately the creature bolted under the sofa, only her gleaming green eyes visible as she stared out at them, clearly terrified of being dragged into the Floo again—not that Harry blamed her.

Harry joined Remus and Teddy on the floor, and pulled the boy into a hug.

“See you tomorrow, Ted,” Harry said as he offered Teddy one last gentle squeeze before he let him go, “and you be a good boy for your Gran.”

“I'm always the *goodest* boy, Uncle Harry!”

“Debatable,” Remus muttered under his breath, smiling as he spoke, and Harry snorted, though it seemed as though Teddy had not heard him. “Come on, Teddy, let's go see your Gran.”

Teddy enthusiastically leapt into the fire as Remus took his hand and guided him into the Floo, calling out Andromeda's address as he went, and they disappeared in a whirl of green flame.

Harry smiled to himself as he sat down and waited for Remus to return. Though Teddy had proven more than once that he was capable of taking the Floo all by himself without getting lost, Remus had always been protective of his son. He insisted on accompanying him

whenever he took Teddy to Andromeda's house or by Shell Cottage to spend an afternoon with Victoire and Dominique. No one ever remarked on Remus's attitude—it had always been a quiet sort of protectiveness, and not overt and ridiculous. He could spend a few hours or an evening away from his son without panicking, and so no one worried that Remus was going overboard with how he acted with Teddy.

On the contrary, Harry thought it was *sweet*.

Harry was given little time to think on this as Remus returned, and offered Harry a sooty kiss before he said, “come on, let's wash up and change, then we can go. I'm afraid the place I have reserved for us does not allow casual wear.”

“You didn't think to mention this *before*?” Harry asked with a wince as he stood up and followed Remus up to the second floor as he groaned internally at the thought of dressing up—one of his least favourite activities.

“Of course not,” Remus replied, chuckling a little. “We've all heard the story of you trying to wear jeans to Ron and Hermione's wedding. If I'd told you we were going somewhere fancy, I have this odd feeling that you'd try to get out of it.”

“You don't know that for sure...” Harry began, and laughed when Remus snorted with disbelief.

The pair took turns showering and dressing, Harry finding a brand new set of green dress robes in their shared wardrobe, and he was quick to kiss Remus in thanks for the thoughtful gift.

Remus dressed in similar robes in style, but they were an earthy brown that suited him, and Harry smiled as he pressed a small wrapped box into Remus's hands.

“What's this?” Remus asked, eyeing the box, and Harry smiled sheepishly.

“I read that it's not really traditional for an omega to give gifts on Valentines, and rude in some circles, but I couldn't help myself,” he explained with a weak smile, and Remus smiled warmly as he leant in to offer Harry a kiss in thanks before he redirected his attention to the gift in his hands. He pulled away the ribbon and opened the box, displaying a set of white gold cufflinks, inset with pieces of elephant skin jasper.

“It's gold, not silver,” Harry said quickly, and Remus chuckled as he looked up from admiring the gift, and offered Harry a warm smile.

“I assumed, Harry,” he replied, still chuckling a little, and Harry flushed, but smiled when he saw Remus exchange the simple cufflinks he was wearing for the new ones, and then moved in to kiss Harry again. “Thank you, they're beautiful.”

The pair headed outside and Apparated to a fancy little Italian restaurant on the edge of Diagon Alley called, *Il Forno di Roma*. Through the enormous windows Harry could see people to one side of the space eating at little round tables, and dancing on the other. Distantly, he could see a quintet of string instruments at the very back of the space that apparently playing themselves.

“Come on,” Remus said as he wrapped an arm around Harry's shoulders, and guided him towards the restaurant, “I have a table reserved at the back, where we're less likely to be disturbed.”

Harry nodded, smiling a little as he followed Remus's lead into the place, relieved that he'd remembered Harry's preference to *not* be noticed. Remus spoke to the hostess, informing them of their reservation, and she led them, as promised, to a little round table at the back of the restaurant. It was a stone's throw away from the kitchen doors, which smelt strongly of cooking meat and garlic, in the best possible way.

“Your menus,” the hostess said after they'd been seated, passing one to each of them, “and the wine list.”

The wine list was a narrow booklet that was all but forced into Harry's hands, and his eyes widened a little at the sight of it. He knew *nothing* of wine, but if Remus noticed his reaction, he didn't say anything about it, instead he thanked the hostess, and she informed them that the waiter would be with them shortly before she turned and walked back towards the front of the restaurant.

“See anything you like?” Remus asked conversationally as he set the wine list aside, and Harry quickly mimicked him. He glanced down to the laminated parchment in his hands that served as the very short menu, momentarily blanching when he realised it was all in Italian, but relaxed when he spotted the small, tasteful drawings that accompanied the menu items, and shrugged a little.

“Not yet,” Harry hedged, not quite willing to admit he didn't speak Italian, just as a waiter Apparated right in front of their table, making him jump a little in surprise.

“Good evening, sirs,” he said, smiling brightly at them, though his eyes had not wavered from Harry's hairline, much to Harry's annoyance. “Welcome to *Il Forno di Roma*. May I tell you of tonight's specials?”

“Can you just bring us a bottle of *Montepulciano* and two glasses, please,” Remus said patiently as he offered the waiter a little smile, and the waiter jumped, as though he'd only just remembered that Remus was even there.

“Of course, sir,” the waiter said with a small, respectful bow. “Please wave me down when you are ready to order.”

The waiter Disapparated, while a wine bottle and two crystal glasses materialised upon the table, filling automatically, and Harry watched the liquid drain from the bottle at the same time.

“I’m sorry, Harry,” Remus said as he picked up his glass and took a small sip. “I should have warned you...the waiters here can be a little pushy, but the food is worth it, I promise.”

“I’m holding you to that, Harry said with a soft chuckle as he sipped the wine, and found it to be the kind that he usually preferred, like Remus had selected it with him in mind.

Harry felt himself warm at the thought, and hid his reddening face behind his menu while he tried to pick something out.

In the end, Harry selected a pasta dish with a cream sauce, clams, and cheese, while Remus ordered a veal dish, and Harry was markedly relieved at the familiar looks and smells of the food—when he’d seen the place, he’d anticipated fancy foods that he’d never heard of, and the familiar fare was an odd sort of relief.

That, and it was *delicious*.

It took Harry much more self-control than he’d anticipated to eat politely, and not stuff his face, happily sharing tidbits with Remus while they chatted, laughed, and drank. It was lovely, relaxing, and made Harry’s feelings for Remus grow without effort. Even if he was uncertain before, now he knew that regardless what the future might hold for them, he felt like he could do this—be with Remus, help him raise Teddy, and *not* feel like he was settling. It was a wonderful, freeing sort of feeling, and almost made Harry want to weep with joy.

“Oh, I’ll be back in a moment, Harry,” Remus said partway through their shared serving of tiramisu, and laughed a little as he wiped his lips with the napkin. “It seems as though I’ve had a little too much wine.”

“Hurry back,” Harry said before he could fully think through the words, and immediately felt himself go red. “Oh God, that sounded *so* corny.”

Remus did not make fun of him, but laughed again as he leant in to peck his lips, murmuring, “I’ll ensure you pay for it later, if that would make you feel better.”

Harry felt his flush worsen at the soft, sultry tone with which Remus spoke, but he was not given a chance to answer as the older man straightened up and strode past Harry, towards the toilets, as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

Harry smiled to himself as he waited for Remus to get back, using his spoon to fiddle with the dessert while he waited, unwilling to eat without his mate present.

Suddenly, a heavy hand fell on his shoulder. Harry smiled—Remus was back.

He turned, and his smile immediately fell as he locked gazes with the person who was touching him.

It wasn't Remus.

It was Lucius.

Voices

Chapter Notes

A/N: And we're back! Thank you guys so much for your ongoing support and patience, and I hope that this update will be worth the wait! Next update will be January 27th.

Trigger Warning: Sexual Harrassment

Chapter Seven – Voices

At the sight of Lucius Malfoy so close to him, Harry leapt to his feet, his hand diving into his pocket for his wand. The older man moved too quickly for him however, and closed a hand around Harry's wrist, stopping him short.

“Ah, ah, ah,” Lucius said, his voice little more than a purr, while the limb slid from Harry's shoulder to the back of his neck, and he squeezed it gently. “None of that now, Mr Potter.”

As though Lucius had cast some sort of Imperius Curse on him, Harry felt all his will—all his *fight*—drain away. His head lolled on his shoulders, and his arms felt heavy. He couldn't move them. He let out a small whine, his eyes widening as he stared at Lucius, which only made the alpha smirk.

“Now, it appears there's quite a line to the Gent's, and your *mongrel* will be a while,” Lucius said, smirking again as his thumb brushed over the side of Harry's throat, almost in a caress, and he shivered with disgust.

“Y-You—” Harry tried, but his tongue, like his arms, felt heavy, and it was difficult to form words. Lucius cut him off before he could say much more.

“No talking,” Lucius said, his voice firm, and Harry felt his rich dinner roil in his stomach as he immediately fell silent.

Why was he *obeying* Lucius Malfoy?

Worse, why couldn't he *fight it*?

He'd shown Voldemort that he could throw off the Imperius Curse, so why couldn't he throw off Lucius's commands?

“Oh, do not be frightened, little omega,” Lucius purred as he inched closer. Harry wanted to run away, but he still couldn't shake off Lucius's command, and remained as still and silent as

a doll. “We're just going to take a little walk. A nice, *quiet* little walk, and I will happily replace that filthy scar upon your neck—”

Lucius broke off when a hand closed around the alpha's wrist, prying it away from Harry's neck. Harry wobbled, his head spinning, just as Remus forced himself bodily between Harry and Lucius, and shot the other alpha with a nasty glare.

“I do not recall hearing Harry's consent for you to touch him, or permission for you to use your Voice on him, Lucius,” Remus said coolly, squaring his shoulders as he stared at Lucius, his posture and facial expression utterly devoid of fear, but Lucius did not appear at all intimidated by Remus's stance.

Harry moved to back away from the two alphas. Remus seemed to sense Harry's intention however and reached back for Harry. His movements were plaintive, as though he was silently asking for his omega to stay close. Harry quickly slotted himself into the crook of Remus's arm while his alpha moved his hand to grasp the back of Harry's neck, though much more gently than Lucius had. This time the touch was relaxing, but Harry was still utterly bewildered at Remus's statement to Lucius. *Voice*? What did Remus mean?

“I do not recall *needing* permission to take what you stole from me,” Lucius countered in a similarly icy tone, his shoes sliding across the stone floor slightly, as he took up a more formidable stance, as though he was trying to intimidate Remus using only his posture. “What would a mongrel like you *want* with Mr Potter? You may as well be his father, surely you see how inappropriate it would be. Even if the Omega Protections Office does not see the negative connotations there, I most assuredly do.”

“Oh, so in taking Harry *against his will*, you are merely looking out for his best interest?”

“Naturally,” Lucius replied silkily, and smirked yet again, though this time it was as though he was withholding some sort of vile secret. If the way Lucius was staring at Harry was any indication, likely it was what he planned on doing to the omega if he ever got his hands on him.

Harry shivered, and Remus hugged him closer as Lucius added, venomously, “Any human would make a better mate than a half-breed like *you*.”

“How *dare* you,” Harry hissed, his anger flaring up and eclipsing his fright as he bared his teeth at the offending alpha. “Remus is a war hero, you're just a stinking piece of Slytherin scum who barely escaped Azkaban! Remus is one of the best and bravest men I've ever known, so don't you *dare* talk about him like he's less than you!”

“Control the omega, Lupin,” Lucius said, rolling his eyes, as though he hadn't heard a word that Harry had said. “He is speaking out of turn.”

“What year do you think this is, Lucius?” Remus asked calmly, an eyebrow arched with quiet incredulity. “It is not the eighteenth century—omegas have protections and rights these days. You cannot dismiss their words as though they have no voice, and you *cannot* treat them like chattel. Harry is my mate, my partner, and my *lover*. I will not allow you to touch him when it

is quite clear he does not wish it. If you will not listen to him, then listen to *me*—leave him alone.”

“How sentimental you are, Lupin,” Lucius said, his voice almost approving, but there was a mocking quality to his words that Harry didn't like. “We shall see just how protected he is by these so-called *rights*. Oh, yes, we shall see. Good evening.”

Without another word the older man stalked off, and Harry felt his body sag in relief, despite the warning in Lucius's tone. For the moment, Harry was grateful that Lucius was gone, and that Remus was still holding him.

Harry turned in Remus's tight embrace, and hugged the older man close. Harry felt his body begin to tremble, more shaken than he wanted to admit by the encounter. He didn't quite understand why he felt so terrified, and why he suddenly felt like crying. Harry had never been overly weepy, and to feel like that now was well beyond odd.

“Can—can we go?” Harry asked, his voice barely above a whisper as he spoke. “I want—I...we—w-we need to go. *Please?*”

If Remus felt at all perplexed by Harry's jumbled request he did not show it, but merely nodded as he continued to hold onto Harry. Out of the corner of his eye, Harry saw Remus flag down their waiter, and asked for the cheque.

“And, if you please, do mind your guests,” Remus added with an icy tone that Harry had never heard from him before. “I was in the loo for not five minutes, and my mate was accosted by a pushy alpha, despite the fact that we are mated. I do not want any trouble, but such an ordeal was deeply upsetting for the both of us.”

Harry, ashamed and conflicted about why Remus felt the need to tell the waiter all this, buried his face in the crook of Remus's neck. Harry scented his mate, finding comfort in it, while he tried not to listen to Remus's conversation with their waiter. Worse, the waiter insisted on calling his manager over to discuss the matter, which to Harry at least, was even *worse*.

Harry's face burned at the inexplicable need he felt to hide through it all. Remus held him just as tightly as before while he repeated the story to the manager and rubbed Harry's back consolingly at the same time. The manager hastily offered them a free meal as a small recompense for their experience, which Remus graciously accepted.

Harry's embarrassment and shame seemed to radiate off him as they headed out of the restaurant. He clutched tightly to Remus the whole way, afraid that if he softened his grip even a little, Lucius might spring from the shadows and snatch him away.

Neither of them spoke until they had Apparated back to the house, when Harry promptly demanded crossly, “what was all that bollocks with the waiter and the manager? Was it just to get a free meal?”

“Of course not,” Remus replied, his tone patient and kind. He wrapped his arm around Harry's waist again and led him inside, pausing long enough for them to shed their cloaks and

boots before Remus gently guided him to the sofa in the sitting room.

Remus gently coaxed Harry down upon the piece of furniture before he conjured a tea platter, pressed a cup into Harry's hand, and pulled him close again before he finally resumed speaking.

“As nice as it would be—or as petty as it may seem, depending on your view—to use the terrible experience you had just for a free meal, that is not why I did it. I would have asked for your permission to tell them, but you seemed to be in no state to do so—”

“—yeah, sorry about that,” Harry interjected with a wince. “I've no *clue* why I was acting like such a...a...I don't know, skittish owl or something, hiding in your neck like that. And I was *shaking*. It was terrible.”

Harry winced as he omitted the part where he'd felt like weeping, though even without saying it, he had a sneaking suspicion that Remus would know regardless. There was no judgement in his eyes however, only warm understanding.

“It's not your fault, Harry,” Remus replied, his voice firm, but gentle, and he squeezed him gently in silent reassurance. “It is an instinct of your secondary gender to seek out your mate when you are in danger. Lucius posed a very real threat tonight, and your body reacted to it faster than your mind did. It is not a weakness, I promise you.”

“It sure *felt* like one,” Harry mumbled, casting his eyes downward as he chewed on the inside of his cheek. “And what was that *Voice* thing that you and Lucius went on about? Like an incantation or something?”

“No,” Remus replied, shaking his head, while his gaze seemed to darken. “An Alpha's Voice is something that has been the product of debate for many years. In essence, it is an ability alphas have where they are able to assert control over any omega they choose, using only the sound of their voice.

“Many scholars have debated why we have developed this ability, and while some feel that it is a means to control an omega in order to protect them, such as during a dangerous situation, or if the omega is in hysterics of some kind...but others feel that it is an alpha's duty is to control their omega at all times, regardless of the necessity of it.”

“I couldn't fight it,” Harry said as he shivered again. “It wasn't like the Imperius Curse, where I could do something about it...I—I *couldn't* fight it.”

“I know, Harry,” Remus replied softly as he laid a gentle, reassuring hand on Harry's knee. “But it's over now...”

“No, Remus,” Harry interrupted, his voice cracking a little, “it's *not* over. What happens if I'm at the hospital and some alpha is there, out of his mind, and decides to use his Voice on me? Or—or...or if Lucius comes back when you're not round? What happens *then*? You said I could still have my life, but I can't, can I? I need to constantly worry about blokes I don't even know harassing me just because I'm a bloke who can have kids, and—”

“Harry, please,” Remus said as he took hold of Harry free hand, and squeezed it gently. “I know this is scary for you, I cannot even pretend to fathom how frightening it must be, but you must try to listen to me, do you understand?”

Remus wasn't using his Voice, something Harry recognized straightaway. He swallowed thickly as he watched Remus watch him, his eyes pleading as he tried to get Harry to calm himself.

Slowly, albeit somewhat reluctantly, Harry nodded his head.

“What Lucius did to you was abuse,” Remus said firmly. “I could use different words and phrase it more prettily, but I will not do so, when there are so few terms to accurately frame the abhorrence of Lucius's actions. To use one's Voice to harm, and not as a means of protection, is the measure of his character, and does not make you in any way less or weak for what he did to you. It was his actions that were wrong, Harry, for using his Voice in such a way, not yours, for succumbing to it.”

Remus paused, and reached out to touch Harry's cheek. The touch was tender and reverent, and the look of pure, unhindered adoration in his eyes made Harry's heart flutter as he listened to Remus continue to speak.

“Lucius Malfoy used his Voice in a despicable way; he used it to violate your autonomy, because that is what Lucius Malfoy *does*. Any alpha worth his status would never harm an omega—their own, or any other. I will not lie to you, it does happen, and much more often than it should. However, *many times* these people are imprisoned or fined for this, and never is the omega to blame for it occurring. It is not your fault, Harry. You have *nothing* to be ashamed of.”

Harry felt his throat tighten again. He had just enough sense to set aside the teacup that he still held before he leant forward, and buried himself in Remus's warm embrace. The alpha let out a little sigh, somewhere between amusement and pleasure at Harry's need for closeness, and instead of speaking, he rubbed Harry's back gently, holding onto him with such sweet tenderness that it made Harry almost want to weep.

“Thank you, Remus,” Harry murmured. “Not just for saving me tonight, but for—for *everything*.”

Harry kissed him, the act more needy than loving, and he shivered as Remus's hand trailed up his back one last time before it disappeared into his hair, twining through the dark locks as he kissed Harry back, making Harry once more lose himself in the sweet escape of Remus's intoxicating touch, before Harry pulled back incrementally, and began to speak, his words halting and uncertain.

“I don't know if this is...er, *bad*, I guess,” he began, “but...er...do you think we could...” Harry felt his face flood with colour, and Remus chuckled warmly as he continued to play with Harry's hair.

“If we could...?” Remus prompted when Harry had trailed off, and Harry laughed weakly in embarrassment.

“Er, if we could just...pick up our night where it was left off, so to speak? I mean, pretend the thing with Malfoy never happened?”

“Are you certain that's wise, Harry?” Remus asked, his voice soft and a little roughened, as though he wanted what Harry was offering, but like he always did, he seemed keen to verify that Harry truly wanted it before they proceeded. “You just endured something very traumatic, something that has drastically changed your outlook on the life of an omega. If you wish to wait, I would not be offen—”

“—no,” Harry interrupted, frowning at Remus as he spoke. “I need this—I *need* something to distract me, or I'm just going to keep obsessively thinking about it, and how I'm a little scared to go back to work now, and plus we have that inspection thing coming up, and...” Harry paused, and heaved a sigh. “It's so complicated, but when you touch me...things feel simpler. It reminds me how good you are, and how you make me feel. You always make me feel so...happy, Remus.”

Remus leant in, and pressed his lips to Harry's in a tender kiss. Harry reached up to rest a palm against the side of Remus's close-cropped beard, his fingers brushing along the soft hairs as he settled into the kiss, letting out a soft, needy moan as he shuffled closer to his mate, until he was almost perched in Remus's lap.

“I will indulge you, Harry,” Remus murmured, his voice much more distinctly hoarse this time, as though he was just barely curbing the impulse to scoop Harry up and have his way with him. “On one condition.”

“What's the condition?”

“I don't want you to use intimacy with me to hide from your problems,” Remus said firmly. “Being with you is wonderful, Harry, but I don't want you to use our time together as a tool to avoid things. Just talk to me, and I will do whatever I can to help you. Understand?”

“Yeah,” Harry confirmed with a small smile, “I understand.”

“And if you wish to stop, what do you say?”

“I say, *stop*,” Harry replied, his smile widening a little as he chuckled at the older man warmly, and rolled his eyes. “You've told me that at least a thousand times, love.”

Harry's voice stuttered to a stop as he registered the term of endearment that had slipped past his lips unbidden. Remus appeared just as surprised as he was by it, and Harry felt himself flush again.

“I'm sorry,” Harry said quickly, biting his lip with nervous uncertainty as he gazed up at Remus. “Was that...wrong? Or too soon or something?”

“I...don't know,” Remus admitted awkwardly, and Harry laughed. The mirthful cry burst from his lips suddenly, and he laughed loudly, while he reached forward to hug Remus close.

“Oh, you have *no idea* how much of a relief it is to know that you are as out of your depth in all this as I am...*love*.”

Remus chortled warmly, his hand falling upon Harry's cheek, and he guided him into a kiss, one which Harry partook in without complaint, letting out a little sigh as he shifted closer, and wrapped his arms around Remus's neck, keen to draw out the kiss for as long as he could.

“All right,” Remus murmured against Harry's lips, “I shall indulge you, Harry, but if you need to stop at any point, please tell me.”

“I will,” Harry replied, his mouth quirking into a small half-smile of amusement. Part of him was almost annoyed at the repetitiveness of Remus's urging that he let Remus know the moment Harry felt that he went too far. At the same time however, Harry appreciated it, and knew that Remus's intent to never go further than Harry was comfortable was yet another display of how different Remus was from other alphas.

He did not see Harry as a toy, or as his property.

He saw Harry as his *lover*.

Love

Chapter Notes

A/N: Next update will be February 10th. Enjoy! :)

Chapter Eight – Love

As one, Remus and Harry began to head for their bedroom.

Harry stumbled a little as they went, the gravity of what he'd requested of Remus beginning to hit him full-force. Though he was nervous, he was also excited. He did want this, despite his continued nervousness over how this might change the dynamic of their relationship even more.

Remus kissed Harry the moment they'd made it to their room. The older man's large hands fell upon his cheeks, cradling his face gently, as though Harry was precious. Harry whimpered, his voice needy as he threaded his fingers through the front of Remus's dress robes, drawing him closer.

“Harry...” Remus breathed, the word escaping him almost as a moan, one arm wrapping around Harry's waist, urging him forward until he he was pressed firmly against Remus's chest.

“*Please...*” Harry replied as his fingers moved shakily to the clasp on the front of Remus's robes again. “Remus, I need this...I need *you*.”

Remus appeared somewhat conflicted by the admission, as though he wasn't certain whether Harry was being truthful or not.

In an attempt to convince him of his willingness, Harry kissed Remus again, crushing their lips together almost on the side of too rough. The hand at the front of Remus's robes began to slowly unbutton the garment, pushing the outer robe off, and revealing a white shirt and dark slacks beneath it.

“God, you're so beautiful,” Harry said softly, and beamed when a delicate flush dusted over Remus's cheeks, paired with an uncertain look in his eyes, as though he was not sure whether Harry was exaggerating or not. “Really,” Harry added as he reached up to touch the alpha's cheek. “You are just...*so* beautiful.”

“Not a hideous beast?” Remus asked wryly, and Harry shook his head as he leant in to kiss him again.

“Nothing about you could *ever* be hideous, Remus,” Harry replied, punctuating his words with more gentle, tender kisses. “You are so attractive, and so kind, and so...*everything*. I couldn't even imagine going through all this with anyone but you.”

Remus smiled again, a sad sort of smile, as though he still did not wholly believe it. In this, Harry could understand—likely, Remus felt guilty about pushing Harry into a relationship that he did not initially want, but Harry no longer felt that way. He *wanted* to be with Remus, and that was a wonderful, freeing sort of feeling.

Keen to prove to his alpha that he was completely willing for them to proceed, Harry took a small step back from him, and moved closer to the bed. He smirked, and loosed the top button of his robes.

Harry's eyes bored into Remus's, keeping his gaze upon him as he slowly divested himself of the outer robe, then his shirt. He then eased back on the bed in just his trousers, teasing the zip idly while he stared at Remus, and waited for him to move.

“Harry—” Remus began, but this time Harry had a feeling he knew what the older man was going to say, and stopped him short.

“Remus, if you ask me if I'm sure one more time, I might *actually* kill you,” Harry said sweetly. “I am sure—dead sure. I am completely, and utterly sure that I want this, so get your arse into bed before I hex you.”

Remus laughed, his cheeks turning pink again in embarrassment for his repetitiveness as he acquiesced to Harry's demands, and made for the bed.

Remus stumbled a little, making Harry smile at him warmly—encouragingly. It was oddly endearing how nervous Remus seemed to be; shouldn't it have been the other way around?

And yet, Harry felt no apprehension whatsoever. He *wanted* this.

Remus eased down on the bed next to Harry. His eyes were glazed over with longing, and his limbs seemed to be trembling, as though he was just barely keeping himself from pouncing on Harry.

Harry braced his weight on his arms, leaning back a little, and shivered with delight as Remus followed him, crossing an arm across Harry's torso, pressing his palm into the mattress on his opposite side, so that he was hovering over Harry, close enough to touch, but he wasn't, not yet.

“Tell me what you want, Harry,” Remus murmured, and Harry bit his bottom lip, just barely managing to stifle a laugh. Was he *really* going to have to go over this again?

“I want what we talked about,” Harry replied easily. “I want the frottage...thing. With you.”

Harry frowned at Remus when he spotted the uncertainty on his partner's face. Harry cocked his head to the side, and tried to figure out the look that he saw displayed there. It was a

conflicted expression, but Harry couldn't tell if it was uncertainty whether Harry was positive that he wanted this, or if *Remus* wasn't ready to do this sort of thing with Harry.

“Remus, love?” Harry asked, using the pet name again, and he smiled inwardly at the warm rush that seemed to fill him as he said it. “Are you all right? Are *you* not ready?”

Harry bit his lip, concern dampening his arousal as he regarded his partner. He hoped that Remus would not feel compelled to go forward if *he* wasn't ready, but Harry had absolutely no idea how to vocalise that without it sounding condescending or manipulative.

“No, I am,” Remus replied in a little bit of a rush, making Harry arch an eyebrow, and the older man flushed. “I have wanted you since I marked you,” he added, reaching up to trace the scar on Harry's throat, making the omega shiver. Harry arched his neck in a display of pure submission, and Remus exhaled shakily, as though the silent show of trust was almost too much for him. “I just...I can't help but feel like you are being forced into this, Harry.”

“Do I *look* like I'm being forced?” Harry countered, arching a brow, and Remus chuckled softly.

“No,” Remus replied, his fingers straying from his mark, and beginning to trail, slowly, almost hesitantly, down Harry's chest. “You look completely willing, but I do not know how much of that is pheromones, and how much of that is truly *you*.”

“Remus,” Harry said with a soft huff of annoyance as he sat up a little. “How many times must we go through this? Yes, I was *initially* pushed into this; and yes, *initially*, it *was* pheromones, but when I got to know you better, got closer to you...how could I *not* fall for you?”

“What...what are you saying?”

“Oh, Remus,” Harry said, shaking his head as he began to laugh. “It's *really* a good thing you're so handsome, because you can be bone-dead *stupid* sometimes.”

“Harry—”

“I *love* you, you idiot.”

Harry knew that it was probably too soon to say it. They had only been *together*-together for a few weeks, after all; surely it took longer to know such a thing for certain. However, Harry could not deny that he knew it to be true—he felt it with every part of his being.

He *loved* Remus, regardless whether or not the alpha could see it.

Remus smiled. It was a sad, anguished sort of smile, as though he did not truly believe what Harry was saying. Harry leant up to kiss him, a gentle brush of lips at first before Harry grew more bold, extending his tongue to brush against Remus's lips, and he opened his mouth, his own tongue darting out eagerly to taste Harry.

Harry moaned his assent, a hand falling to the back of Remus's neck, holding him close as they kissed. It didn't matter to Harry that Remus had not said it back; he could *feel* it, and knew that it might take the stubborn man a little longer to actually *admit* how he felt.

Harry's hand moved to the front of Remus's shirt, taking the lead, despite how odd it felt to his omega instincts, and he thumbed open the buttons of the garment, smiling inwardly when he felt the alpha shiver.

"You okay, love?" Harry purred, momentarily breaking the kiss, and Remus chuckled as he nodded.

"I am," he replied, "are you?"

Harry grinned in answer.

"Never better," Harry replied, leaning up to ghost a kiss over Remus's lips, making the older man tremble a little. "Please, love, I am not second-guessing here, I want this. I *want* you."

"Oh, Harry..." Remus whispered, Harry's name escaping him as a vocalization closer to a moan. His shifted one hand to the back of Harry's neck, cradling it, and Harry trembled with longing, his breath catching in his throat as he kissed Remus again, his fingers falling to the last buttons upon his shirt before he gently pushed it off of Remus's shoulders.

Remus shifted away from Harry long enough to fully discard the shirt, then he was on his omega again. Their bare chests pressed together and Harry moaned again, doing all he could to reassure Remus that he wanted this.

Remus let out a tiny growl as he moved, his hand tensing incrementally on the back of Harry's neck, making the omega gasp as Remus's kisses became rougher; more insistent.

Harry moaned, relaxing in Remus's embrace. Despite the almost dangerous edge to Remus's movements and vocalizations, Harry had never felt safer than he did in that moment.

"Please," Harry keened against Remus's lips, shifting just enough to display his marked throat to Remus, which made the alpha growl in pleasure. "Please, my alpha..."

"Harry..." Remus murmured, his voice close to a moan as his mouth trailed from Harry's kiss-swollen lips to his mark again.

Remus pressing his mouth into the rounded scar, as though he intended to bite him again. Immediately, a bolt of white-hot pleasure lanced through Harry, and his eyes widened.

"Oh, God, *Remus*..." Harry shuddered and moaned, squirming on the bed as Remus's hand tensed on his neck, both domineering and soothing all at once as he bid him to be still.

"*Mine*," Remus murmured, the word whispered against Harry's mark, and he shivered as pleasure shot through him again. He could not completely fathom why Remus claiming him like this felt so good and so right, but Harry couldn't find it in himself to care.

He was Remus's.

More than that, Harry *wanted* to belong to Remus, and no one else.

By the end of the night, Harry wanted to positively *reek* of Remus's heady, intoxicating alpha scent, telling everyone he came across that he belonged to Remus Lupin.

“Yours, just yours,” Harry agreed, tilting his head farther back to show Remus more of his throat.

Remus inhaled deeply, his breath stuttering over Harry's throat, his hand pressing to the centre of Harry's chest, and began to inch slowly, tentatively downwards and towards his groin.

“Oh, God, *yes...*” Harry moaned, and he smiled inwardly as Remus drew him into another kiss. Likely, that consent was what Remus needed to hear in order to proceed, and he was proven right as Remus continued his trek downwards.

Remus pressed the heel of his palm into Harry's visible erection. Harry abruptly broke their kiss, his head flying back as he moaned. Remus's body quivered with mirth, though he did not tease Harry for his reaction.

“Feel good?” Remus murmured, and Harry glanced up at him, panting a little, and his arousal was momentarily eclipsed by incredulity. How was it Remus could look so *composed* at a time like this?

That wasn't right.

Harry wanted to see Remus lose that composure.

Harry wanted to *make him* lose that composure.

“It'd feel better if I could see you, feel you—*all* of you,” Harry replied hoarsely, and Remus's breath seemed to still, just for a moment, as though Harry's brazenness was somehow shocking to him.

“Harry, are you s—”

“—Remus, love, remember the talk we had about asking me if I'm sure?”

“Are you referring to the one where you threatened to murder me if I asked again?” Remus asked wryly, and Harry smirked a little as he leant in to capture Remus's lips in a soft, tender kiss.

“Smart man,” Harry replied approvingly, and pecked the alpha's lips again before he finally resumed speaking. “I am *sure*. I am also willing, and very, very horny. Please stop asking and bloody well get *on* with it.”

Remus laughed, a delicate, embarrassed flush blooming on his cheeks as he leant in to offer Harry another sweet kiss.

“I’m sorry for repeating myself so much, Harry,” Remus murmured, his breath tickling across his dampened lips. “I just want to make sure you know that just because we are mated does not mean you *must* be intimate with me—you can always say no if you are not ready, or do not like what we are doing.”

“I know, love,” Harry replied, reaching up to touch Remus’s cheek as he leant in for a kiss of his own. “I promise you, I know. But this...I want it. I want to feel you touch me, and I want to *see* all of you. And, Remus, the same goes for you. If *you* need *me* to stop, you need to tell me.”

Harry bit his lip, and Remus immediately reached out to touch his chin, tugging lightly on the skin until Harry released his lower lip, and Remus leant in to offer him another kiss.

“Then if we are both in thundering agreement, let us proceed, shall we?”

Finally.

Harry reached down for Remus’s belt, and fumbled with it awkwardly while he crushed his lips to Remus’s, his enthusiasm making him clumsy.

Remus chuckled warmly as he kissed Harry back, cradling the omega’s cheeks again, his thumbs brushing over them in a light caress while he allowed Harry to wrestle with his belt. At last he finally managed to get it loose, and Harry nearly cried out in celebration of his success.

Harry unwillingly broke the kiss, and Remus let him go, as though he knew what Harry wanted to do.

Harry glanced down, lower lip caught between his teeth again as he focused his attention on Remus’s trousers, his hands shaking minutely in anticipation. Still, he tried to hide this fact from Remus, worried that the older man might misinterpret the physical reaction as fear.

Harry moved his fingers to the top button of the garment, and flicked it open carefully. It exposed some of Remus’s sandy and grey pubic hair, and Harry shivered with delight as he gazed at it. Every single part of Remus was truly *wonderful*.

Harry then moved his fingers to the zip, his thumb pressed to the bottom and pointer finger to the top, feeling the cold metal and merely *experiencing* it for a long moment before he gently began to tug it down. In that same moment, Harry discovered an important fact about his mate—that he did not, in fact, wear undergarments.

Harry licked his lips as the thick erection sprang free. His mouth watered a little as he closed his hand over the organ, feeling the slightly raised skin at the base of Remus’s cock, where his knot had already begun to form.

Harry rubbed his thumb over the faint ridge, and smiled when Remus inhaled sharply.

“H-Harry...” Remus keened, his hips twitching a little, and his trousers inched a little farther down his hips.

“Feel good?” Harry purred, offering the alpha's cock another little squeeze. Remus whimpered, and his hips twitched again.

“H-Harry...” Remus repeated, his voice keening and body shivering with desire as he arched back a little, stumbling on his open trousers, and Harry grinned, pleased with the reaction.

He eased up the pressure for a moment in order to reach out and help Remus the rest of the way out of his trousers, enjoying this new confidence that he felt when he spotted the nervous look in Remus's eyes. He'd never thought that it would be *Remus* who would be nervous about proceeding with this, and not himself.

“You all right, love?” Harry asked softly, and Remus offered him a warm, adoring smile.

“I am *wonderful*, Harry,” he replied, the slightest lilt of a purr in his tone as he leant forward, and brushed his fingers over Harry's thigh, the fabric of Harry's trousers bunching a little under his fingers. “Though I will be much better when I can see *all of you*, as well.”

“I'm not as...*built* as you,” Harry warned as he reached for the buckle of his belt without hesitation, though he flushed a little with embarrassment at his admission. He'd never been particularly self-conscious about his size up until now, but upon seeing what Remus was packing, it was difficult to *not* feel a little intimidated.

“Size has never mattered to me,” Remus replied easily, and Harry snorted.

“Easy to say when you're hung like a hippogriff,” Harry countered, making Remus laugh out loud.

“Really, Harry,” Remus said, stretching out luxuriously upon the bedspread while Harry dallied with opening his trousers. “I would never think less of you for your size.”

“I know you wouldn't,” Harry replied when he finally won the battle with his trousers and got them open. He gripped the waistband while he offered his alpha a tender smile. “You're too good for something so petty.”

Remus smiled, but did not respond as Harry took a little breath. The magnitude of what was about to transpire had hit him again, but he didn't hesitate. He inched down his trousers and pants, and his own erection popped free.

Harry did not miss how Remus's gaze fixed almost hungrily upon Harry's cock; the alpha's eyes had widened slightly, and it was though he longed to devour Harry whole.

“Er...like it?” Harry asked, and immediately winced. “God, that sounded so *stupid*...”

“Shh, Harry,” Remus murmured as he crawled over to him, blanketing Harry with his body as he leant in to offer his omega a gentle kiss. “You're perfect.”

Harry felt his skin flush with heat, arousal, embarrassment, and pleasure. It all bled together in his head as he arched up to kiss Remus back. His arms wrapped around the alpha's neck, and his hands buried themselves in Remus's hair while he let out a soft little keen of longing before he pulled back incrementally, and gazed into Remus's eyes.

“So...erm...” Harry trailed off, and bit his lip for a moment before he asked, “how do we...you know, *do this*?”

“You mean the *frottage thing*?” Remus asked, his voice just slightly on the side of teasing, and Harry flushed again as he nodded.

“First, we better move a little, stretch out, so to speak...” Remus said, guiding Harry closer to the head of the bed, and then eased him onto his back.

“Then,” Remus continued, “I get on top of you like this...” he trailed off as he rested his knees on either side of Harry's hips, and braced his hands upon the duvet just above Harry's shoulders.

The position was very dominant of Remus, something Harry rarely saw in him. He was usually so neutral, so unassuming that it was sometimes hard to remember that he was an alpha at all. The dominance Harry felt now coming from his alpha was oddly intoxicating. It made Harry's arousal spike, and he squirmed a little beneath Remus as he asked, “yeah? Then what?”

“A little lubrication first, or it can be a bit uncomfortable,” Remus replied, chuckling warmly at Harry's enthusiasm as he reached over to open the drawer of his bedside table, which was presently closer than his wand, and extracted a small jar of lubricating gel.

Remus slicked them both up, quickly but efficiently. Harry moaned at the feel of Remus's hand on his cock, no matter how brief, and nearly wept when it disappeared.

“Shh, my Harry,” Remus murmured as he leant in to peck his lips lightly. “Good things will come soon...”

Harry responded with a whimper, wanting to say something coy, or clever, but nothing came to mind. Instead, he lay there, fidgeting a little while he waited for Remus to proceed.

Remus leant in and captured Harry's lips in a soft, tender kiss.

Harry kissed him back, his hands lifting to cup Remus's cheeks, stroking his short, soft beard as he moaned into the kiss, while Remus lowered his hips, gyrating until Harry felt the first brush of Remus's cock against his own.

“*Oh*,” Harry gasped, abruptly breaking the kiss, and Remus offered him a warm, dopey smile.

“Feel good, baby?” Remus purred, and Harry felt his face flood with colour at the pet name, though this time not from embarrassment.

“Y-Yeah,” Harry replied softly as he arched up for another kiss. “It feels...*so good*.”

Remus let out a tiny growl, allowing Harry to kiss him as he rolled his hips again, grinding their cocks together, and giving Harry more of that delicious friction.

Harry arched his hips to meet Remus's movements, and was gifted with a shuddering gasp of pleasure from the alpha. The surprise that Harry heard in the vocalization gave him the

impression that Remus may have assumed that Harry would simply lie there and *take it*, which seemed ridiculous, considering what Remus knew of Harry's personality.

Harry reached down as Remus continued to move, using both his hands, and closed them around both of their cocks, creating a tight vice with his hands around the pair of pulsating organs, which caused Remus to hiss with both surprise and pleasure.

“Oh, oh...*Harry*...” Remus moaned, trembling as he froze momentarily, and Harry grinned up at him.

“Feel good, love?” Harry asked softly, and Remus nodded his head once.

“It feels *wonderful*. Please, just...just leave your hands there...” Remus murmured, his voice almost pleading as he guided Harry's hips to move in tandem with his, sliding in and out of the hole that Harry had created. Remus's breath stuttered, his pupils blown wide, while Harry moaned, arching his back as he followed Remus's lead without effort, even as the alpha's knot began to inflate, bumping lightly against Harry's fingers.

“Harry...oh, *Harry*...” Remus whimpered, apparently unaware that he was repeating himself as he was lost in the sensation. Harry had momentarily lost the ability to speak as their bodies slid together, slick from both the lube Remus had used, their sweat, and precum. Harry was just barely holding back his release, his arms shaking from the strain of holding his hands still, made worse when he felt that distinctive tickle in his stomach of his orgasm beginning to approach. Based on Remus's continuing moans of pleasure, Harry had a feeling that Remus wasn't too far off either.

“Yeah,” Harry breathed at last, panting hard. “Cum for me, my alpha, let go, let me *see* you...”

The words seemed to push Remus over the edge, and he came with a shout, trembling as Harry squeezed his knot, simulating the constriction of his hole. Harry arched his back and came as well, their semen mixing together on the omega's stomach in a few quick, painfully short spurts.

Remus slumped forward, panting hard, his hot breath ghosting over Harry's throat, and making him shiver.

“That was...Harry, that was *amazing*,” Remus breathed, rolling off Harry and onto his side before he drew Harry close, apparently uncaring that they were both still wet and sticky. He nuzzled Harry's throat, licking over Harry's mark, as though he was trying to douse Harry even more in his scent.

“It was...God, Remus, it was so good,” Harry replied, rolling over so that he could face his lover. “I have no words for how amazing you were, though I hope now you really understand that you *can* ask for sex, or...or... you know, *whatever* without asking me if I'm sure five thousand times.”

Harry arched his brow pointedly, and Remus flushed a little.

“I'm sorry, Harry, if my asking ruined the mood, but I'd rather be sure,” Remus replied as he leant in to kiss him again before he continued to speak. “I don't ever want to harm you, or make you feel obligated to do anything with me. You're still you're own person; our partnership doesn't change that.”

“You're such a good man, Remus,” Harry said softly as he arched up to peck Remus's lips in return. “And it makes me feel so good and so safe that you care so much—that you always want it to be my choice.”

Remus leant in, and kissed Harry again.

His alpha held him close, cradling him gently, as though he were precious, while Harry kissed him back, every inch of himself flooding with affection for this man, this alpha.

But even as he was overwhelmed with such a feeling of completeness, a niggling worry was still present at the back of Harry's mind.

The inspection from the Ministry was in three days' time.

Was this *enough*?

Was Remus *certain* that this would save Harry from Lucius's clutches, or merely stave him off for now, until he found another loophole to exploit?

Harry wanted to ask Remus what he thought, but he couldn't bring himself to ruin the moment. There would be time enough to ask—later.

Instead, Harry closed his eyes and curled up closer to his mate, hoping that his worries would disappear with the morning light.

Little Red Ribbon

Chapter Notes

A/N: Next update is scheduled for February 24th. Enjoy! :) Please note the special St Mungo's ward that appears in this chapter is of my own creation, and not canon.

Content Warning: Mental Illness Discrimination

Chapter Nine – Little Red Ribbon

The chiming of the alarm drew Harry slowly out of his daze that morning.

He had been awake for several hours already, though he hadn't done much towards actually getting up. Harry was staring out the window, and had watched the sky turn from black, to indigo, then at last to the pink and gold of sunrise.

Today, he was scheduled to return to work.

Without Remus by his side.

Harry hated how nervous he was, and how the idea of going anywhere without him lent his imagination to horrifying visions of Lucius Malfoy kidnapping him, or something worse. He could defend himself against normal wizards without issue, but in the face of the Alpha Voice, he was terrifyingly helpless. He *needed* Remus, and today, he wouldn't be there.

It took Harry several long moments to remember to grab his wand and wave it in order to dismiss the Chiming Charm. At his back, Remus began to stir. He circled an arm around Harry's waist, and drew him closer.

“Hmm...morning, Harry,” Remus murmured sleepily, his lips falling to the nape of Harry's neck, and he planted a soft, feathery kiss there, making him shiver with delight, despite his worries for the day ahead.

“Morning,” Harry replied, forcing a smile, despite the lack of need for it, given that Remus could not see his face from this angle.

“Nervous for today?”

“Not as nervous as I am for *tomorrow*,” Harry replied pointedly, and Remus chuckled as he coaxed Harry to roll over, and he pressed a gentle, loving kiss to his lips.

“Try not to think about the inspection tomorrow,” Remus said, his fingers stroking along Harry's cheek, and making his stomach flutter. “Save tomorrow's worries for tomorrow. We have done all the necessary steps, and they have no reason to force you to leave. Today, you are back to work, and you need a clear head in order to be a *brilliant* healer for your patients.”

Harry smiled a little as he nodded, and arched up to press a kiss to Remus's lips. He didn't want to go, not when things still felt so uncertain, but given that his three-week holiday was finally at an end, there was little he could do about it—he needed to get back to work.

“I'm still only a *trainee*,” Harry reminded him teasingly, and Remus responded by kissing him again.

“It doesn't matter,” Remus murmured reverently, “you're still brilliant.”

Harry flushed, smiling as he buried his face in the crook of Remus's neck, and the alpha laughed, the sound warm and welcoming, while he reached up to stroke Harry's hair.

“I'm still a bit nervous about going back,” Harry confessed, speaking the words against Remus's skin. He felt Remus turn slightly, then he pressed a firm kiss to Harry's temple before he resumed stroking his hair.

“Because of the risk of running into an alpha? Or Lucius?”

“Yeah, er, both,” Harry replied, sighing a little with frustration. “So much for *house arrest*, eh?”

“If he can get to that restaurant without a team of MLE wizards swooping down on him, likely he's managed to overturn his conviction,” Remus said, and Harry glanced up, brow furrowing with confusion.

“How could he? Why didn't we know? Did you know? Why didn't you tell *me*?”

“Harry, please,” Remus said, his voice soft and pleading, rather than impatient or dismissive. “I don't know, not for certain, it is merely a guess. My *guess* is that he plied the Wizengamot with enough gold or other assets to get his conviction overturned. I would *assume* that he also has the means to convince the *Prophet* to keep it quiet, and by extension, we would not have heard of it. Chances are, he is clever enough to not bribe those of the Wizengamot who are friendly with us. Therefore, I do not know anything for certain, and I am merely sharing my theories with you now. Does that make sense?”

“Yeah,” Harry agreed, albeit somewhat reluctantly. “How come you didn't say anything before? Or at the restaurant?”

“Primarily because I was uncertain *why* he was there, and did not wish to give him an opening to rattle us further, you in particular.”

Harry winced, but did not protest. He had been a right mess that night, and so he could understand why Remus may not have been willing to share his worries with Harry at that

particular moment.

“But next time, can you just...not hold things back from me?” Harry asked, his mouth twisted into a faint grimace. “I'm not some delicate flower, I'm still *Harry*. I can handle it. We're partners, not one above the other, right?”

“Right,” Remus agreed easily, and offered Harry an apologetic smile. “I'm sorry, Harry, I'll try not to do it again. If you catch me doing it, it may be unconscious; an alpha will often feel that they need to protect their mate, even when it is unnecessary. Just remind me if it happens, and I will stop.”

“All right, deal,” Harry agreed, smiling as he leant in for another kiss.

~*~

Harry and Remus took their usual turns showering and dressing, then Harry headed down to the kitchen to start on breakfast while Remus went to rouse Teddy. It was all very *domestic*, and Harry was legitimately surprised by how much he enjoyed it.

Harry watched the eggs and bacon cook, stirring or turning them occasionally while he transported tea and coffee pots to the small kitchen table, along with a jug of pumpkin juice and jam, as well as warm toast while he finished up the eggs and bacon.

Now that they had settled into something akin to a normal routine, Harry and Remus always took turns cooking. However, at first Remus had been more keen to do things for Harry, as though Harry might like him better if he woke up to freshly-made breakfast every morning.

Harry chuckled to himself, shaking his head. Remus's tendency to dote on him he found sweet, but wildly unnecessary. He already *liked* the older man, and food wasn't likely to change that. He wanted to be Remus's partner, after all, not have him be some sort of servant to Harry.

“I love it when Uncle Harry cooks!” Teddy chirped as Remus led him to the kitchen table. The boy was still in his quidditch pyjamas, with a violet dressing gown pulled over top of them, and fuzzy-wuzzy bunny slippers on his little feet, while Remus was dressed in corduroy trousers and a thin brown jumper.

“You like it more than *my* cooking?” Remus half-teased, and laughed when Teddy began to nod.

“He makes *bacon*, Daddy, you always forget it. And his skambled eggs are better than...than...than...maybe even better than *cake*!”

Remus laughed again, and Harry smiled as he spooned the aforementioned scrambled eggs onto a platter, along with the bacon he'd made, and carried it all over to the little table where his mate and godson were waiting. Remus poured some juice into Teddy's sippy cup, while

Harry served Teddy some breakfast, before he helped himself, with Remus following suit. Harry went for the coffee, Remus the tea, and the little family tucked into their breakfast.

“Uncle Harry?” Teddy asked, his voice soft, almost dejected, and Harry glanced up at him from over the rim of his mug.

“Yeah, Ted?”

“Do you *has* to go to work today? How come you can't stay here and play with me?”

“It's only for a little while, Teddy,” Harry said fondly, reaching across the table to ruffle his hair, and making the boy giggle. “Then I'll come home and we can play then. But you'll have your daddy and Bast here the whole time I'm gone.”

“But Daddy isn't as fun as you!” Teddy whined, making Harry laugh, and Remus choked on his tea.

“I will have you know, young man, that Harry thinks I am *very* fun,” Remus retorted, his voice heavy with mock offence, making the little boy giggle.

“Not in front of Teddy, dear,” Harry quipped teasingly, and grinned when Remus turned bright red, and Teddy began to laugh harder, clearly not understanding the innuendo, but loving his father's reaction all the same.

Harry smiled, pleased with the chaos he'd created, and went back to his coffee.

~*~

Harry was about ready to head out the door half an hour later when Remus abruptly pulled him aside, away from Teddy. The little boy was in the sitting room, busy throwing toys for Bast to chase, and had not seemed to notice his father drag Harry off.

“Remus?” Harry asked, gasping a little as Remus tugged him into the kitchen and out of Teddy's line of sight, where he kissed the omega firmly on the mouth.

Harry froze for a moment, startled by the sudden show of affection, but he quickly relaxed, and reached up to wind his arms around Remus's neck, drawing the kiss out a little longer.

“I have a gift for you,” Remus murmured against his lips, making Harry laugh softly.

“You mean that amazing kiss *wasn't* the gift?”

Remus smiled, apparently caught between annoyance and amusement at the remark, while he reached into his pocket, and pulled out two red strings.

Harry stared at them for a moment, confused. Upon closer inspection, Harry saw that they were not simple red strings, but braided bracelets, like the old friendship bracelets that muggle children might make for each other.

“This is your red ribbon, so to speak,” Remus explained as he took one of Harry's hands gently in his, and tied one of the bracelets in place around his wrist, loosely enough that it wasn't too constrictive, before he tied the other around his own wrist. “In stories, sometimes if the main character must go to a scary or uncertain place, they tie a red string or ribbon to the entrance, the...*safe space*, so that they might find their way back.

“*This*,” Remus continued, his fingers moving to touch the bracelet on Harry's wrist, “is your way back, Harry. I know you are nervous about returning to work, and I know that you are nervous about coming across alphas that are not me. This is our connection. Beyond your mark, this is your way back to me. I will be with you wherever you go.”

Harry reached up to kiss him, his arms once more winding around Remus's neck, hugging him close, and did his best to hide his joyous tears from his mate. How was it that Remus simply *knew* he needed such a reassurance? It was something so small, so simple, but somehow it made *everything* easier to deal with.

Remus, however, was not fooled by Harry's attempt to hide in their moment of affection. He chortled warmly, and reached up to brush away Harry's tears while he returned the kiss.

“I love you, Remus,” Harry breathed against his lips, and Remus offered him a sweet smile.

“I love you too, Harry.”

~*~

Harry went to work that morning feeling much better about everything, and in particular more confident that he could maintain his work professionalism without this new aspect of himself getting in the way.

Although it might be hard to explain how a little red bracelet was making him grin like he'd been gifted an engagement ring.

In reality however, it was unlikely that anyone would really notice his odd behaviour, except perhaps Hermione.

Harry Apparated to London, reappearing in an alleyway not far from St. Mungo's. He stepped through the main entrance without issue, the special ID badge affixed to his shirt telling the warding magics that he was on staff.

Harry's confidence rose as he entered the hospital, and headed down one of the passageways that led to the staff changing rooms. He'd almost made it to the door when he was suddenly (and enthusiastically) greeted by one of his fellow trainee healers.

“Oh, *Harry!*” Hermione cried, and Harry yelped as she leapt at him so hard that he wound up on his back.

“Ow,” he replied, wincing a little, but Hermione was already up and helping Harry to his feet. “Blimey, Hermione, *warn me* next time you plan to do that.”

“Sorry,” she said with a small wince, while Harry resumed his walk to the changing rooms, and she followed his lead. “It's just been *ages* since I've seen you, that's all.”

“I know, sorry about that, by the way,” Harry replied, grimacing a little. “Remus suggested I invite you and Ron over, or go out with you guys, but...it felt weird to be away from him at first.”

“The mating bond was settling,” Hermione said knowledgeably, and nodded her head once. “It makes sense that you wouldn't want to be away from him.”

“How d'you know that?” Harry blurted out, then remembered who he was talking to, and rolled his eyes. “Stupid question. How many textbooks did you inhale on the subject?”

“Just *The History of Wizarding Gender* by Rowena Brisby, oh, and a treatise on the interaction between betas, omegas, and alphas. *Oh*, and a few essays on the subject.”

“Wow, that's like...*barely research* for you,” Harry teased, and Hermione huffed a laugh before she reached out to lightly flick his ear.

“Shut up, Harry,” she said affectionately, and Harry grinned at her before he slipped into the Men's changing room, and out of her reach.

Inside, Harry stepped over to his locker and unlocked it, swapping out his street clothes for his trainee robes. They were the same green colour as a regular healer's robes, save for the white cuffs on his sleeves, identifying his station to both staff and patients as a trainee.

Harry cast the necessary cleansing and disinfecting charms on himself before he shut the locker and headed back outside, where Hermione was still waiting.

“So...” Hermione began, trailing off a little. Her tone told Harry that she likely wanted to ask about Remus, but didn't quite know how to pose the question without being rude. Harry angled his hand upward in order to fiddle the bracelet without Hermione noticing, and he waited for her to speak, but when she merely flushed and said nothing, Harry answered without being directly asked.

“Remus is fine, we're good,” Harry filled in, “it's been...*really* good, actually.”

Harry glanced down to his right wrist, where the red bracelet still lay, and he smiled to himself.

“Really?” Hermione asked, and he glanced back up at her. “No...awkwardness?”

“Oh, bloody hell, no, *tons* of awkwardness,” Harry replied, laughing, “but...he's just so...so...I dunno, *good*. He cares about me being okay with what we're doing, and he worries about pushing me, and his foul-ups are so small, but when it happens he just does his best to make it right, and...it's really good, Hermione.”

Hermione appeared relieved to hear this, but didn't verbally answer. Instead, she reached out to take Harry's left hand, and they headed the rest of the way up to their floor together.

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Despite Harry's worries and dire predictions for his first day back, the whole day seemed to zip by without a hitch. Harry and Hermione's group of trainee healers had been assigned to the Abernathy Ottis Ward that day, or the Mind Healers' Ward, where witches and wizards with supposedly incurable mind diseases were housed.

In reality, Harry knew both what was the matter with many of these patients, and why both he and Hermione had been assigned there so frequently.

Depression, Bipolar Disorder, Schizophrenia—the list went on and on. At first, Harry had only an inkling that the diagnoses of these patients was not a strictly magical affliction, but now he knew for certain.

After studying General Healing for several years, Hermione began to share something with Harry—a book called *The Diagnostic Standards Manual*. A muggle book, which detailed all the disorders he and Hermione were seeing in this particular ward.

It made it easier to identify these disorders, in particular when the licensed healers had no idea how to treat them. Unfortunately, to Harry and Hermione's horror, their patients were still institutionalized instead of helped.

It had been terrible to realise just how backward some aspects of the wizarding world were. Many people from non-magic backgrounds, like himself and Hermione, recognized these ailments not as incurable, but treatable, while those of pureblood backgrounds appeared distinctly reluctant to admit that Harry and Hermione's hunches were right.

As a result, few people were been willing to listen to a pair of trainees about mental health treatments in the muggle world, nor how they could be mimicked or even improved with potions. For now, they were resigned to their own experiments when they were granted lab time, and they did their best to curb any and all inhumane treatment of their patients.

Change would come for these people, if slowly.

Despite the normalcy of the day, at least to Harry, in this particular ward, *normal* didn't exactly apply.

Harry's favourite patient, an elderly Alzheimer's patient named Robert, occupied most of his time as he frequently mistook Harry for his deceased wife, and kept trying to get him to dance.

“Sorry, Bob,” Harry said gently as he put the old man's hands down into his lap, and offered him a smile. “I'm *Harry*, remember? I'm your healer today.”

“Oh, Evelyn, your jokes are just so amusing,” he replied in a cheerful, if reedy tone of voice, “I do love them so. Come out to the garden with me, Evelyn, my begonias look *particularly* lovely this year.”

Harry shook his head, smiling fondly, and allowed the man to talk. He sat and listened, while the old man appeared wholly unaware that it was no longer 1948.

By the end of the day, Harry was rather pleased to go home, and shared a hug with Hermione as they stood in the alley, preparing to Apparate.

“Oh, Harry,” she said with a watery smile, “you did really well today, and the patients still *adore* you. I used to think that you choosing this over becoming an Auror was not really your calling, but it's like...like you just *know* what the patients need to hear. I'm really proud...and a little jealous.”

Hermione smiled again as Harry laughed and offered her another hug.

“Offing one dark wizard was enough for me, Hermione,” Harry said, repeating what he'd been telling his friends and family ever since the end of the war. “I just want to help people now.”

“I know, and I'm proud of you,” Hermione said, her eyes teary as she sniffled and rubbed the back of her hand against her eyes. “Though I don't quite think you managed to get the *quiet life* you wanted.”

Harry snorted, and shook his head, half in dismay of her remark, and half in agreement.

“You're not wrong,” Harry agreed at last, and bit back the urge to share his worries for tomorrow's Inspection. It was a full day closer now, and despite how relaxed he portrayed himself in front of Hermione, inside he felt his stomach churning with anxiety over what was to come.

Instead of speaking on it, he bid her goodbye, and they both Apparated home—Hermione to Ron, and Harry to Remus.

The Inspection

Chapter Notes

A/N: Next update is scheduled for March 10th. Sorry about the delay, I've been sick all week x.x Enjoy!

Chapter Ten – The Inspection

“Daddy, why is Uncle Harry in fancy clothes?” Teddy asked as Harry stepped into the kitchen for breakfast. Remus glanced up at him, and Harry flushed at the vaguely incredulous look he saw painted upon his mate's face. “Is he going somewhere fancy? Like the...the...opera?”

“Where on *earth* did you hear about the opera?” Remus asked with a warm laugh, ruffling Teddy's hair once and making the boy giggle before he turned to Harry and offered him a gentle, reassuring smile. “Go change, Harry. The inspector will not be any more impressed or unimpressed by your almost-too-small dress robes.”

Though Remus had spoken the words delicately, and meant no harm by them, Harry still felt his heart clench as embarrassment flooded through him as he hurried from the kitchen and back to their bedroom. Upon reaching it, he sat down heavily upon the bed, and buried his face in his hands while he tried to remember how to breathe.

“Harry?”

Remus's voice filled the silence as he tapped lightly on the open bedroom door, and when Harry looked up through teary eyes, he laughed weakly and dried them on his sleeve.

“I'm sorry,” Harry said weakly, “I don't even know *why* I'm so weepy...”

“Your heat is coming up, which can cause mood swings in the days leading up to it, the full moon is next week, and the inspection is today,” Remus filled in as he entered the room, sat down next to Harry, and rested his hand gently on Harry's knee. “It's a lot. It's all right to be stressed and overwhelmed. Showing your tears makes you no less of a man, Harry.”

“I'm still sorry,” Harry said with a weak snuffle, and Remus wordlessly offered him a handkerchief, which he accepted, and he blew his nose before he continued. “I know that this is stressful for you too, but I keep worrying that we should have actually...*you know*. Instead of that frottage-thing.”

Harry leant against Remus while he tried to calm down, and Remus wrapped an arm around him silently, his hand moving up to rub his shoulder gently while he pressed a light kiss to the top of Harry's head.

“We have done everything that was needed, and I am not about to force you to have penetrative sex when it is clear to me that you are not ready for it.” Harry opened his mouth to deny it, but Remus cut him off before he could speak. “I am a werewolf, Harry, I can smell your nervousness whenever it comes up.”

Harry's body slumped forward a little, and he pressed the thumb and forefinger of his right hand to the bridge of his nose while he heaved a sigh. Remus's other hand moved to Harry's opposite shoulder, and he gently began to massage the tension away, not speaking, as though he knew that any reassurances would not exactly be helpful at the moment.

“The official rules for an omega claim of this kind states only that we find release together in a mutually sexual act,” Remus reminded him in a soft, patient tone of voice. “It says nothing of the sort of sexual act it needs to be. That means that we have nothing to worry about. All right?”

“I know,” Harry mumbled, sighing a little. It didn't feel particularly *all right*, and he was still almost blindingly nervous about what was to come, but at the same time Harry felt as though repeating himself would not help matters either. “How long do we have until the inspector gets here?”

“An hour and a half,” Remus replied as he stopped massaging Harry's shoulders, shifted, and reached out to gently cradle Harry's chin in his hand before he guided him into a gentle kiss. “Why don't you get changed into something more comfortable, and come out and sit with us for breakfast? I know you don't have much appetite when you're nervous, but I'd like you to at least try a cup of tea, all right?”

“Okay,” Harry relented as he smiled weakly up at his mate, “for you, I suppose I can try.”

Remus smiled, and pressed a kiss to Harry's temple before he left him to get changed in peace.

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Harry did as he was told. He changed into a set of his *nice* jeans, and a thick green woollen jumper, which paired quite well with the snow falling outside. The trio shared a fairly peaceful breakfast, with most of the talking being done by little Teddy, as usual.

As promised, Harry did try to stomach a cup of tea. It was an herbal ginger blend that Remus had put together especially for him in an attempt to soothe his nerves, though it did not help nearly as much as Harry would have liked.

“Uncle Harry?” Teddy asked, tugging on the side of his jumper a little later, while Harry had been manually washing the dishes from their breakfast.

“Yeah, Ted?” Harry asked, pausing to turn off the hot water as he gazed down at him.

“Can we go play in the snow?”

“Not right now, Teddy,” Harry said with a wince as he grabbed a tea towel, and dried his hands. “We have an important person coming to the house, and he needs to talk to us. Do you remember?”

“Yeah,” Teddy hedged, grimacing a little as he spoke. “Daddy told me last night before bedtime. He said a man was coming from the Min'stry to talk to us 'cause... 'cause...you and Daddy needed to do stuff to let you stay here. But it's okay, Uncle Harry, 'cause we live next to the woods. You and me can go *pretend* to play, and run away together, and Daddy can come if he wants. That way, the man won't have *any* reason to take you away, and we can be together forever.”

Harry felt his throat tighten as he listened to the boy's speech. What on *earth* had Remus said to him?

“Come sit with me, Ted,” Harry said, and guided the boy over to the sofa in the sitting room, dislodging a few of the 'nice' throw pillows that Remus had laid out while he asked, “what exactly did your dad say to you last night?”

“Just that a man was coming to talk to us about you.”

“Then why did you say all that stuff in the kitchen about running away?”

“B-Because...” Teddy trailed off, his eyes welling with tears, and he sniffled once before he managed to form the words, “b-because I heard you and D-Daddy talking and the man might take you away if you're not frothy enough!”

Harry rolled his lips together, caught between the desire to laugh, and hating himself for not having the forethought to put up the appropriate silencing charms, in order to keep Teddy from overhearing their discussions and worrying him—or having him hear something he definitely should not have.

“I'm not going anywhere, Teddy, I promise,” Harry said at last, pushing forward every ounce of self-confidence he could in an effort to reassure the youngster. Despite his own fears about the inspection, there was no reason for Teddy to feel nervous about the visit as well. “Your dad and I have done everything we need to for me to stay here, and there is absolutely *no* reason for the Ministry to take me away. I'm not going *anywhere*.”

“Y-You promise?” Teddy asked, still sniffing a little, and Harry smiled at his godson fondly while he reached out to wipe the boy's cheeks gently with the sleeve of his jumper.

“Yeah, Teddy,” Harry replied, “I promise.”

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After Harry was certain that Teddy felt better, he went back to the dishes.

It didn't take long for the other Lupin to seek Harry out while he was scrubbing the frypan.

Harry laughed as Remus's arms wound securely around his waist, and the alpha's nose tickled along the crook of his neck, scenting him intimately.

"I saw you with Teddy before," Remus murmured, one of his hands snaking down a little farther, making Harry hiss. "You're a good father."

"Don't you mean godfather?" Harry asked, his voice trembling a little from Remus's sinful wandering hand. Teddy was in his room playing, ensuring that he would not spot anything inappropriate, but it still felt almost wrong to indulge with everything else that was going on, and in particular with their current topic of conversation.

"No, I mean father," Remus replied, retracting his hand, almost as though he'd heard Harry's thoughts, and kissed his neck gently. "You parent him as much as I do."

Harry rinsed off the pan, laid it in the drying rack, and turned to face his mate.

Remus's eyes were soft, and he was smiling, making Harry's heart flutter. He reached out to wrap his arms around the older man's neck, and arched up to kiss him.

"I love him like my own," Harry murmured, "but I don't want to take away the role of father from you."

"You aren't, love," Remus replied as he moved in to kiss him again. "You being here does not nullify my status as his father, nor does it mean you have replaced Dora. You can feel like his father, if that is what you want."

"What are you trying to say?"

"When everything has settled...how would you feel..." Remus paused, his eyes darting back and forth, studying Harry's face for a long moment, before he asked, "how would you feel about adopting Teddy?"

"Wh-what?" Harry stammered, "take him *away* from you? Why don't you want to be his father anymore?"

"No, Harry," Remus replied, his voice firm, but he was still smiling. "That is not what I am implying. I am asking if you want to be Teddy's other father, parent him with me, as a family. Not just be his godfather."

“Oh.” Harry flushed a deep scarlet, and looked away from his mate. “I feel like I should have known that.”

Remus's fingers gently curled under Harry's chin, and coaxed his gaze up until their eyes met. He leant in to press his lips to Harry's in a soft, loving kiss, then rested their foreheads together while he continued to hug his omega close.

“You are well beyond stressed about today, and you just started back to work, and as I said earlier, your heat is approaching, as well as the full moon. It's a lot to take in. Especially now, it sometimes makes us misinterpret things, and it happens to the best of us. I promise you that I am not offended by your presumption.”

“I think it'd be a *brilliant* idea,” Harry murmured softly, before he arched up to press a kiss to Remus's lips. “I just wanna make sure you're doing this for Teddy, and for us, and not just because you think it'd make me happy...you know?”

“I could not imagine a better second father to Teddy than you,” Remus replied, and kissed Harry again. “Once everything with the inspection today is over, I'll see about getting the paperwork together.”

Harry opened his mouth to respond, but at the same moment there was a hard, firm knock upon the front door.

The Inspector.

“I'll get it,” Remus said calmly, and pressed another kiss to Harry's lips. “Harry, *breathe*. Everything is going to be fine. We have no reason to be nervous. Do you hear me? Everything is going to be *fine*.”

“Everything will be...fine,” Harry replied, and winced at how soft and uncertain he sounded. “O-Okay. I'm okay. I'll get Teddy. You get the door.”

Remus kissed Harry one last time before he stepped from the kitchen, and headed towards the front hall.

Harry hastened upstairs to Teddy's room, where he found the boy rolling a ball across the floor for Bastet, though she seemed more interested in watching its progression than chasing it.

“Bath isn't playing right,” Teddy complained when Harry stepped inside. “Is she nervous about the man too?”

“She might be,” Harry conceded as he crouched down next to his godson. “But she has no reason to be. Everything is gonna be fine.”

“Are you sure?” Teddy asked, eyeing Harry dubiously, and he offered his godson a small smile.

“Yeah, I'm sure,” Harry replied confidently, and held out his hand to Teddy. “Come on, the man is here, it's time to go say hello.”

“Do I have to?” Teddy asked, and Harry swallowed thickly. He didn't want to force Teddy, but he knew that they needed to hurry it up.

“Yeah, Ted, you gotta,” Harry replied. “Come on, be brave like me and your dad. It'll be over quick, then you and Bast can get back to playing.”

“Okay,” Teddy said with a heavy sigh as he dropped the cat toy, and Harry took his hand.

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In the sitting room, Harry found Remus seated upon the sofa with a stranger, sharing a pot of tea.

He was tall and thin, bent awkwardly in the chair and dressed in a full set of dark blue robes, with a pencil-thin moustache and short hair pinned to his scalp with far too much hair product, making it look wet. When Harry stepped into the space, his nose wrinkled a little at the scent of an alpha who was not his mate in his safe space. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Teddy scrunch up his face and rub his nose, as though the smell was bothering him too.

“Ah, here,” Remus said when Harry stepped inside with Teddy, who immediately hid behind Harry's leg when the stranger glanced up. “This is Harry, my omega, and Teddy, my son.”

“That is a son from a previous marriage, yes?” the man asked in an unpleasantly nasally tone of voice, while he looked over at Harry. His gaze flicked up and down his body critically, making Harry shiver with discomfort.

“Yes,” Remus replied, his voice softening a little. “His mother passed away when he was about a month old.”

“Hmm...” the man intoned, setting down his teacup as he stood up and approached Harry, his brow pinched as his dark, beady eyes raked Harry's hairline. “And you put a claim on *this* omega? Why?”

“Why does any alpha claim an omega?” Remus asked, his voice calm and even, but even so Harry could hear the undercurrent of warning in it. “Because I...I wanted him.”

“And yet he is not with child.”

“I haven't had a heat since I've been here,” Harry interjected quickly, and he felt himself flush a little when the man regarded him as though he was a speck of dirt on his shoe, made worse by his discomfort at speaking on this subject in front of Teddy. It couldn't be appropriate for a child to hear this, but what else could he do but respond? He was loath to do anything that might risk having him taken to Lucius. “I've only had one heat since I presented, and that was before Remus claimed me.”

Harry's face continued to burn with shame and discomfort at having to say all this in front of Teddy, while the little boy silently hugged his leg, and didn't say a word.

“Are you damaged in some way, omega?” the man asked, arching his brow, and Harry felt positively sick at the way he was being addressed. When did his designation suddenly make him a second-class citizen?

“Most omegas experience some irregularity with their heats when they first present, as you know,” Remus interrupted coldly. “Please refrain from making my son and omega uncomfortable. This is an inspection, not an interrogation.”

“Yes, of course,” the man said silkily, and he pulled out his wand from his pocket, making Harry tense. Behind him, he felt Teddy's little fingers dig into the fabric of his jeans a little harder.

“It's all right, Harry,” Remus said from his spot on the sofa, though curiously, had not moved. “He just wants to complete the inspection with a body examination to record your mark, and verify that we have...erm...*completed* the requirements.”

Harry flushed at his wording, just as the inspector said dismissively, “Lupin, remove the child from your omega's leg. He will disrupt my work.”

Remus got up reluctantly and moved to pick up Teddy, but this did not go quite as planned when Teddy immediately began to protest.

“No, Daddy, *no!*” Teddy shrieked as he wrapped both arms around Harry's leg and hung on tighter. “No, no, *no!*”

“Teddy, please,” Remus said softly while he reached for his son's hands, while clearly making an effort to not pull him away from Harry too hard. “Don't make a scene. Your Uncle Harry isn't going anywhere, it's just for a minute.”

“No, Daddy, I *have* to stay with him!”

“Oh, this is ridiculous,” the inspector interrupted irritably, and pointed his wand at Teddy.

Before either Harry or Remus could react, Teddy was thrown backward into his father, and they both toppled to the ground.

Teddy let out an ear-splitting shriek of anguish as Remus scooped him up to stop him from running at Harry, and he began to pace, rubbing the child's back gently while Teddy positively howled, screamed, and cried, squirming almost violently in an effort to get away from his father and back to Harry.

Harry looked at Teddy, his heart in his throat, and his limbs shaking as he struggled not to move while the inspector flicked his wand a few times, until a tiny scroll appeared in midair, and the inspector snatched it up.

Harry watched him read it, the man seemingly oblivious to Teddy's screaming, and he felt his heart thrum nervously when the man's impassive expression flickered towards a look of

disappointment for a moment, before it settled back into place.

“It seems as though all the requirements have been adequately fulfilled,” the man said, sounding genuinely displeased by this, even as Harry felt his entire body sag with relief. “The results must be further researched, of course, but it seems as though everything necessary for the claim has been done.”

Remus set Teddy down, and Harry turned to his godson just as he ran for his godfather, tears streaking his red face, and Harry gathered the boy into his arms in a bone-crushing hug.

“It's all right, Teddy,” Harry whispered into his hair. “It's okay, it's okay. No more tears. I'm here, I'm not going anywhere.”

Harry held Teddy close, watching his mate and the inspector out of the corner of his eye, and smiled a little when he watched Remus close a hand on the man's wrist, gentle at first, but firming until the inspector's eyes widened a little in shock.

“If you ever, *ever* do that to my child again, you will be very sorry indeed, sir,” Remus said coldly, his voice heavy with warning. “*No one* has permission to hurt my child, physically or magically. Not even the Ministry's backing would be enough to protect you if you *ever* try that again.”

The inspector, who had never bothered to even offer Harry his name, appeared unwilling to heed his warning.

He harrumphed, clearly not intimidated as he added sourly, “you shall receive the conclusions of our inspection in the next few days,” before he shot Teddy, Harry, and Remus each a glare.

The inspector swept from the house and slammed the door behind him without even a backward glance, and Harry felt his body sag with relief once again, while Teddy let out a tiny sob, and hugged his godfather more tightly.

“It's over, Ted,” Harry whispered, rubbing his back gently. “It's over now.”

Despite the reassurances, Teddy continued to cry, and Harry, in turn knew the truth.

Though the ill-tempered inspector had claimed that he had passed the inspection, Harry couldn't help but feel as though it wasn't over.

Whatever was happening, this was only the beginning.

Nightmares

Chapter Notes

A/N: Next update is scheduled for March 24th. Enjoy! :)

Content Warning: (Very) Mild Bondage/Soft Kink. Please double-check the tags for some new tags I just added. As always, on the particular chapters where they come up, a trigger or content warning will be in the notes on that chapter as well.

Chapter Eleven – Nightmares

Harry eased back on the sofa, exhaling a long sigh. He had a cup of tea cradled in his hands, and Remus was seated next him. Remus's brow was knitted together, his expression clearly pensive; perhaps due to the fact that Teddy was asleep in his own bed for the first time in three days.

After the debacle with the inspector, Teddy had been plagued with nightmares every night since. It was obvious from the start that the root of Teddy's nightmares had not been the altercation itself, but fear of losing Harry or his father. Every night, Teddy would wake up, and wander into their bedroom in the wee hours of the morning, his little face streaked with tears as Remus got out of bed, scooped him up, and nestled him gently between Harry and himself, where the tot would at last fall into a peaceful sleep.

Children were amazingly resilient however, and after three days, the black spot of trauma seemed to be fading—or Teddy was coping; Harry didn't know if these things would ever truly fade. Teddy did not follow Harry around quite as much, and he did not seem to be as openly worried that Harry might suddenly vanish from his life.

“Have you heard back from Kingsley yet?” Harry asked after a long, uncomfortable silence. Remus frowned, and nodded his head.

“I have.”

“And...?” Harry prompted when Remus did not immediately speak, and he felt his stomach turn over with unease. An acrid odour began to weave into Remus's scent, that of an Unhappy Alpha. It was like the muted odour of skunk musk, and it made Harry wish there was something he could do to cheer up his mate, and help him worry less about everything that had been happening lately.

“Kingsley said that if we wished to file a formal complaint, we would be well within our rights to do so,” Remus began, though by his tone, Harry doubted that his explanation would end on a happy note. “However, it would take months, maybe even years. Likely, nothing would come of it. It would be tucked away with every other formal complaint, and forgotten. We could push, and send letters, but that might do more harm than good. The Inspection Board would dredge up every nasty little thing about us they could find, and use it as leverage to have you taken away, rather than us gain any form of justice for our efforts.”

“But...but...” Harry trailed off, and hissed a curse. “Kingsley is *Minister for Magic*. Can't he just...I dunno, *make* them sack that man?”

“You know he can't do that,” Remus replied with a small, sad smile. “If he bent the rules for his friends, he'd have to bend them for everyone, and making exceptions would likely risk his career. I couldn't ask that of him.”

“No, you're right,” Harry conceded almost at once with a small, defeated sigh. Harry drained the last of his tea, set down the mug, and eased into Remus's side. He immediately drew his omega closer, and brushed a kiss to the top of Harry's head.

“I don't know if I could, either,” Harry admitted after a moment of silence. “The only thing now is to make sure that Teddy is okay, and ensure that it never happens again.”

“I hate that I couldn't protect him,” Remus said with a small sigh, while Harry crossed an arm across his waist, and perched his head on Remus's shoulder, embracing his alpha in a hope to console him, though it seemed to do little to relax him. “Teddy should never have been subject to something like that.”

“I know, love,” Harry replied, leaning in to peck a light kiss to Remus's lips. “What that inspector did was *awful*, there's no excusing it. But Teddy is okay, and if you're really worried, there are Child Mind Healers at St. Mungo's, and we can get him help if he needs it. Even if we *don't* think he needs it because of this, it might be good to take him.”

“Why is that?” Remus asked, quirking a brow at Harry. “If he is coping with this ordeal, why should we take him to see a stranger?”

“I think it would be good for him,” Harry offered lightly. “I don't think you're a bad dad—in fact, I think you're amazing with Teddy, but it's pretty clear to me that he has abandonment issues. He cries when I go to work every morning, especially since the debacle with the Inspector; it's like he's afraid that I won't come back. I think a Child Mind Healer has more skills in their arsenal that could help Teddy learn to cope, and learn that just 'cause one of us steps out for a few hours, it doesn't mean we won't come back.”

“That's fair,” Remus admitted, inclining his head a little, the arm around Harry tensing, though Harry could not tell whether it was from their conversation, or something else. “God, this thing with the Inspector went in a completely different direction than we expected.”

“Yeah, it did,” Harry agreed. “And it *totally* mucked up my celebration plans...”

Harry had muttered the latter statement to himself, but perhaps too loudly as Remus arched a brow at him, making Harry flush a little.

“*Celebration plans?*” Remus asked when Harry did not verbally respond to the look his alpha was giving him.

“Erm...” Harry trailed off, and he felt his flush worsen.

“Harry James Potter,” Remus proclaimed with a warm, amused chuckle, “Were you planning on trying to seduce me?”

“I have to *try* now?” Harry shot back, laughing, and he felt some of his embarrassment begin to ebb when Remus joined him in his laughter. “But...erm...yeah. I wanted to...with you...y'know, if the inspection went well.”

“*Well* is relative, in this case,” Remus pointed out, making Harry grimace at how true the statement was. Remus leant in to offer Harry a tender, gentle kiss, before he murmured, “I would certainly not protest if you want to *celebrate*, as it were, despite the less-than stellar circumstances surrounding the Inspector's initial approval, and remember, we are still waiting for the official one.”

“D'you think it's a good idea?” Harry asked uncertainly, “what with everything that's going on?”

“Nothing is certain,” Remus replied, reaching out to stroke Harry's cheek lightly, and Harry instinctively leant into the touch. “Teddy seems to be sleeping peacefully now, but if he sleeps through the night...who knows?”

“I just...I don't want to freak him out,” Harry said, his gaze dropping to his lap as he spoke.

“How about this, Harry,” Remus said, moving in to press a tender kiss to Harry's lips before he continued. “We can *celebrate* if you want. I would love that with you, but I will only consent if you really want to do it. Don't feel obligated to do anything on my behalf. Then, I will set up a charm around Teddy's room. If he wakes from a nightmare, it will chime, and give us a little time to make ourselves presentable before Teddy comes in. And, of course, I shall cast the cursory silencing charms around our own room, so that Teddy does not overhear us. How does that sound to you?”

“I...yeah,” Harry breathed, his voice coming out as a shaky sort of gasp. After everything, he felt like he *needed* this release, and he knew that Remus did too. “Yeah. As long as Teddy sees nothing he shouldn't, I'm definitely more than okay with this.”

Remus smiled, his eyes twinkling as though he'd been waiting a long time for Harry to consent to this. However, beyond the faint look in his eyes, he said nothing that would confirm nor deny Harry's suspicion. Instead, he leant in and captured Harry's lips in a tender, mind-numbing kiss.

Harry let out a tiny moan as he returned the kiss, his arms reaching out to link around Remus's neck, while the older man's hands came to rest on the top of Harry's thighs, his

fingertips a hairsbreadth from the omega's hardening cock.

“*Remus...*” Harry moaned, his lips parting while he extended his tongue to taste him, and Remus groaned, his hands sliding up to Harry's hips, drawing his omega closer.

“We—we need to move this to the bedroom,” Remus murmured against his mouth, his voice hoarse, and the scent of the alpha's arousal was heavy on the air.

“Let's go,” Harry replied at once, grinning as he dragged Remus to his feet. The alpha appeared both surprised and pleased by Harry's enthusiasm, and as one, the pair hastened for the stairs.

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Remus paused long enough to cast the necessary charms on both Teddy's room and the hallway. They stopped to check on Teddy and ensure that the little boy was still peacefully asleep, then the pair hurried the rest of the way to their bedroom, moving as quietly as they could.

Once inside, Remus lifted his wand to cast the silencing charms. Harry opened his mouth to speak, but in the same breath Remus pinned him to the back of the closed door, and devoured his mouth in a heated kiss.

Harry gasped, excitement and arousal seeming to rush through him as he kissed Remus back with equal ferocity. Their teeth clacked, and their tongues twisted together in their desperate need for each other. Remus's hands dove under Harry's shirt, exploring every inch of skin, while Harry trembled with aching need.

“Harry...you're so...so...” Remus trailed off, panting hard, as though he couldn't find the right words to articulate what he wanted to say. Harry responded with an open-mouth kiss, just as Remus's hand trailed up his front, bunching up his T-shirt awkwardly as Remus's fingers found his bonding mark, and the light touch seemed to jolt straight to Harry's groin, making him moan.

“Bed...*now*,” Harry breathed, slick slowly beginning to build in his arse from the heavy smell of Remus's arousal on the air. Though it felt familiar after his first—and only—heat, it still felt odd when not accompanied by the pain he'd experienced during that first week as a newly developed omega.

Remus scooped Harry up bridal-style, their lips still locked together as the alpha swept effortlessly towards the bed. Harry let out a little squeak of surprise, his arms reaching up to link around Remus's neck while his eyes slid shut, deeply enjoying the sensation of being taken care of in this way.

The moment Harry's arse touched the duvet, he began to hastily wiggle out of his clothes, making Remus chuckle warmly at his enthusiasm. He mirrored Harry, albeit at a much slower pace, divesting himself of his cardigan, shirt, and trousers, while Harry waited, naked and aching, for him to finish.

“Oh, Harry, you look so lovely like this,” Remus purred, smiling as he stepped out of his trousers at last, his thick cock almost purple, showing to Harry that despite his relaxed demeanour, he was just as excited about this as Harry was.

“Like...like this?” Harry asked, cocking a brow, and Remus chuckled again.

“Splayed out, ready for me...I could only dream of having an omega as lovely as you.”

Harry smiled weakly, his face warming from the compliment as he watched Remus crawl onto the bed, his movements almost predatory as he leant in to offer Harry a single tender kiss.

“Are you sure you w—” Remus began, but cut himself off when Harry's eyes narrowed into a glare. “Sorry.”

“It's a good thing you're handsome,” Harry groused, making his alpha smile apologetically. “Get over here, you ridiculous man.”

Remus laughed weakly, still visibly embarrassed as he crawled closer to Harry, blanketing him with his body as they kissed, and Harry moaned, once more finding his rhythm within the moment, and no longer annoyed with his mate. Remus hooked an arm around his waist, pinning them chest-to-chest, and Harry shivered, delighting in the strength he felt emanating from Remus.

“How do you want to do this?” Remus asked, breathing the words against Harry's mouth. When Harry scowled again, Remus laughed, and pecked another kiss to his lips. “I am not asking permission again, Harry, I am asking what *position* you would like.”

“Oh.” Harry flushed, and Remus chortled for the umpteenth time as he leant in, this time to press a single kiss to each of his cheeks.

“I will knot, so most omegas feel more comfortable having sex on all fours, but we can also do it face-to-face if you prefer,” Remus explained patiently, his touches dimming to merely holding Harry by the waist, as though he wanted Harry to decide for himself how they wanted to do this, and not have his thoughts muddled by Remus's touch.

“I want to see you while we do it, but we can switch to all fours when you're close,” Harry said without pause, and smiled inwardly at the way Remus seemed to perk up at this, as though he enjoyed the fact that Harry liked to look at him. “Er...do we need, y'know, condoms, or that charm-thing?”

“The Contraception Charm, you mean?” Remus asked, and Harry nodded. “I can perform it if you like, but you are still in pre-heat, and I would be able to smell if your full heat had hit. It

is virtually unheard of for an omega to become pregnant during pre-heat, but if you would feel more comfortable, I can still perform it—it's no trouble.”

“Then I guess we don't need to,” Harry replied, shrugging a little, and Remus nodded his head. Thankfully, he did so despite the vaguely uncertain look on his face, telling Harry that Remus wanted to ask, *again*, if Harry was sure, but he blessedly curbed the impulse.

“Come here,” Harry breathed, “I want to *feel* you, my alpha.”

Remus let out a tiny moan, the sound needy and weak, and he pressed Harry back into the bedspread as he kissed him. Harry shuddered, another jolt of pleasure lancing through him as Remus held him there. Harry lifted his arms above his head in an obvious hint, and Remus answered it without hesitation, his hands reaching up to clasp around Harry's wrists, holding him down.

Once again, Harry felt an excited rush course through him, as though his body was responding to this small touch by saying, *yes, this is good*. Harry didn't quite know if this need to be dominated was an Omega Thing or a Harry Thing, but what he did know was that he liked it, and he didn't want Remus to stop.

Remus shifted his grip, and Harry was preparing to whine in protest when he realized that Remus was still holding him down one-handed, the other migrating down his body and to his waiting arse.

Harry parted his legs willingly, and Remus let out a soft hiss, as though his enthusiastic consent was somehow arousing to him. His fingers brushed over Harry's entrance, and Harry shivered in both longing and a confused sort of nervousness. It felt odd to have someone touch such an intimate part of his body, but he trusted Remus wholeheartedly, and knew that his alpha would not hurt him.

“Are you all right, Harry?” Remus breathed, and Harry nodded.

“Yeah,” he replied. “I want you, Remus.”

This seemed to be all the encouragement Remus needed as he slid his finger deep into Harry's slick hole in one slow but steady motion.

The natural lubrication aided Remus's movements, but Harry could not deny that it still felt decidedly odd, but nowhere near as painful as he had expected.

“Good?” Remus asked, and Harry nodded his head a little.

“Yeah, keep going, love,” Harry said, smiling inwardly when he spotted how Remus's expression softened at the term of endearment, while he added a second finger to Harry's arse.

Remus scissored his fingers, gently stretching Harry, while Harry bit his lip, both joyful and exasperated by how slow Remus was going. It showed how much Remus cared, but at the

same time, the near-painful arousal he felt was making it hard to feel truly grateful for this tender care—he wanted to be fucked, *now*.

“R-Remus,” Harry keened, “p-please...”

Remus's mouth twitched into a smirk, and Harry glared at him. Clearly, the conniving alpha had *known* that the slow pace would drive Harry mad, but he was doing it anyway.

“I'm sorry, Harry,” Remus said as he leant in for a light kiss. “You just sound so *pretty* when you beg...”

“If you get on with it and stick your massive werewolf cock in me, I *might* forgive you,” Harry retorted, and Remus barked a laugh.

“I had no idea you had such a *thing* for werewolves. Should I be offended or flattered that you're objectifying me?”

“*Puh-lease*.” Harry rolled his eyes. “I have a thing for exactly one annoying werewolf who takes forever to get to the bloody point. You're lucky you're so gorgeous, love.”

The latter compliment accomplished what his begging could not, and Harry smiled at the seemingly full-body flush that enveloped his lover.

Remus shifted, moving to straddle Harry's narrower hips, and he leant in to offer him a kiss, perhaps in a bid to shut Harry up—which, in truth, he was fine with.

Remus continued to kiss him while he gently manipulated the position of his legs, lifting them one at a time so that they rested high on Remus's hips, exposing his hole to his alpha.

“Please...” Harry murmured against Remus's lips, and the older man chortled warmly as he at last complied, adjusting his position just enough to ease his cock into Harry's tight confines, which Harry responded to with a groan.

“God, you're so *big*,” Harry said, not wholly aware he was speaking, at least until Remus responded with a warm chuckle, and planted another kiss to Harry's lips.

“Feel good?” Remus asked as he slowly hilted himself inside of Harry, and Harry nodded weakly.

“So good,” Harry replied without hesitation. “Don't you dare stop, I mean it. Hold me down, and fuck me into next week. We can be tender next time.”

Remus laughed again, but did as he was instructed, pinning Harry's arms above his head while he drew out and thrust back in, making Harry's body jerk weakly, and he swore aloud from how good it felt. The ridge of Remus's knot, not yet blown wide, massaged his insides in a new, wonderful way, and it elevated his pleasure higher than he ever thought possible.

“S-So *good*...” Harry moaned, lifting his legs in order to hook them more firmly around Remus's waist, and he locked his ankles together, just as Remus drove into him again, harder this time.

“Moan for me, my omega,” Remus said, his words escaping him between soft grunts, their bodies slick with sweat, and Harry squirmed in the hold that Remus still had on him, crying out in pleasure as Remus thrust into him harder, his knot growing slowly, but steadily, and it careened into the rim of Harry's arse with a force that should have been painful, but Harry only felt blind, unhindered pleasure.

Abruptly, Remus released Harry's wrists, pulled out, and unhooked Harry's legs from around his waist. All of it happened so fast that Harry did not even have time to react before Remus was pounding into him again, from behind this time, while Harry got up on all fours, crying out again as Remus's teeth found his mark at his throat.

“R-Remus, oh, oh *fuck*, Remus, don't stop, *please*...” Harry moaned, on the cusp of weeping as the alpha let out one last snarl before he pushed forward, locking them together, just as Harry felt his mate find his release.

Remus filled Harry's arse with cum, pumping out more than he had last time, and indeed more than he'd ever thought a normal man could expend at once. Harry had little time to ponder on it however as Remus's hand moved to the omega's aching cock, stroking it while he rocked their bodies together, forcing the cum deeper into Harry, despite the fact that he was no longer able to pull out. The dual sensation was far too much for Harry, and he came with a short cry, trembling as his own seed sputtered out over his abdomen as well as Remus's hand, albeit in a much smaller quantity than what he could feel inside of himself.

Harry slumped forward, his body limp and exhausted, even as Remus pumped the last few droplets from Harry's softening cock, and he whimpered from how oversensitive he now felt.

“I—I can't believe I was ever afraid of *this*,” Harry breathed, panting softly as Remus eased him down onto the bed, the alpha pressed against his back while he dusted the top of Harry's shoulders with light kisses. “That was incredible, Remus. Incredibler than incredible.”

“*Incredibler* isn't a word,” Remus pointed out, and Harry huffed a soft laugh.

“Shut up, love, you're going to ruin the moment,” Harry said, and smiled when Remus chuckled warmly, his arms tightening around Harry's waist and drawing him closer, while Harry reached for his wand, and used it to cast a few charms, dissipating the heavy scent of sex on the air, while Remus leant in to press another kiss to the back of his shoulder.

“I think I could get used to this life with you, Harry.”

Harry smiled.

“Me too, Remus.”

The next morning, Harry awoke not in the arms of his mate, but instead with a tiny body curled up against his own.

Harry was dressed in pyjamas that he could not recall putting on, and the sheets had been changed sometime in the night. No hint of his and Remus's activities remained, saving poor Teddy from walking in on anything unseemly.

Harry smiled a little, and petted the tot's hair, making the boy sigh with sleepy contentment, though the feeling of Teddy asleep next to him was bittersweet—the fact that he was there at all told Harry he must've had another nightmare, and had crawled into bed with Harry and Remus sometime after Harry had fallen asleep.

Poor kid, Harry thought sadly as he lay there and watched Teddy sleep. *If only that stupid inspector hadn't done that, maybe none of this would be happening.*

Harry let out a soft huff as he carefully crawled from the bed, intent on finding Remus and wrangling up some sort of decent breakfast for the three of them. Waffles seemed like the ticket—a perfect breakfast food for a lazy Sunday following their brilliant shag the night before.

Harry did not bother with a dressing gown, and instead tiptoed down the stairs in his pyjamas, his bare feet making no sound on the carpet. He smiled somewhat devilishly, planning to snog Remus senseless when he finally found him.

When he at last found his mate however, Harry stopped dead in his tracks, and his heart plummeted into his feet.

Remus was standing at the front door. His back was facing Harry, and before the alpha stood two Ministry wizards whom Harry did not recognize.

When they spoke, Harry realized exactly who they were, and why they were there.

“We've come for the omega.”

Taken Away

Chapter Notes

A/N: Next update will be April 7th. Enjoy! :)

Trigger/Content Warning: Nonconsensual touching, borderline verbal/physical abuse

NOTE: Due to 8 of my stories being plagiarized in the span of a week, as of now all my works are being restricted to Registered AO3 users only, in order to minimize this happening again. I'm sorry for any inconvenience that this causes.

Chapter Twelve – Taken Away

Harry staggered back at the terrifying—no, *horrifying*—statement. As he skittered back, Remus spread his feet, his hands pressing into either side of the door's frame in a distinctly domineering and protective position, stopping the men from passing him.

“We have done everything required of the Omega Claim paperwork,” Remus replied smoothly, his voice tense, but calm. “What reason do you have to take him anywhere?”

“We have the paperwork,” the Ministry official said smoothly, in a winning tone that made Harry clench his teeth so hard that his jaw began to ache. He watched, his heart in his throat as the man handed a scroll of parchment to Remus.

Remus unrolled it, and his eyes widened.

“This is a lie!” he proclaimed, speaking in anger for the first time as he brandished the scroll at the men like a weapon. “*No sexual contact!* What is this rubbish? Of course we have!”

“Ah, but according to the *new* Omega Claim Rules and Regulations, issued on the fifth of February, it must be penetrative or procreative sexual contact,” the official replied, his tone snide, and Harry felt his heart once more begin to thrum in panic. “Perhaps you may have studied the *old* rule listing?”

Remus went silent, his body tense as a violin string. Harry felt a little sick as he watched them. They'd had sex *last night*, certainly that would be grounds to stop them from taking Harry away?

Harry heard his musing repeated as Remus said, “we have had sexual intercourse, sir. You have *no grounds* to take him.”

“On the contrary, I do,” the man countered. “On paper, officially, it says that there has been no sexual contact; therefore, there has *officially* been no sexual contact. We are to relocate him to a pre-selected alpha who has been vetted to handle a potentially problematic omega.”

“Then check him *now!*” Remus sputtered angrily, swinging one arm back to motion to Harry, making it clear that he'd known he was there all along. “Your scans will *tell* you that we have had sexual intercourse! You *cannot* take him away!”

“I am merely a relocation officer, Mr Lupin,” one of the officials said simply, “I do not have the proper licensing to perform that sort of magic on a civilian. You will need to file the necessary paperwork with the Omega Claim office for a secondary inspection to take place. Until then, we are obliged to move him to a more appropriate...handler.”

“And how long would something like this take?” Remus asked icily, and Harry shivered unconsciously at his mate's tone. Never in his life had he ever heard Remus so angry.

“Oh, a few weeks, give or take.”

“Give or take *what*, exactly?” Remus growled, but the man merely smiled at him.

“These things take time, Mr Lupin. If you think a misdeed has been done, you may file a complaint, or, as I said, arrange a secondary inspection. Until then, we are obliged to take the omega to a fit alpha, regardless what your feelings are on the matter.”

“This is a criminal act,” Remus said, his body all but vibrating with anger. “Harry isn't going anywhere. This whole farce *reeks* of Lucius Malfoy.”

“If you try to inhibit us from taking the omega, we can call Magical Law Enforcement,” the second official said, his voice firm and almost taunting. “We could have you arrested for Obstruction of Process if you try and stop us from taking him. Is that really what you want?”

“Remus,” Harry interrupted, his voice trembling a little as he stepped down the remaining stairs, and placed a clammy hand on his alpha's arm. “I-It's okay. I'll—I'll go.”

“Harry!” Remus sputtered as he turned to him, eyes wide and hurt. “You can't say that!”

“Yeah, I need to,” Harry replied, smiling bitterly as he kept his focus on his mate as he spoke. “I know we've had sex, and *you* know we've had sex. We both know who probably set this whole thing up, and where I'm probably going. I've faced off against him before, and I'm not afraid of that scum. You can file the right paperwork to get me out of there, and everything will be fine again. Lucius isn't the only person with friends in high places—I *know* you can do this.”

“Harry, please,” Remus said softly, his voice breaking, “Don't do this to me—I *need* you *here*.”

“I need you too, love,” Harry replied, his hand sliding down Remus's arm to grasp his hand tightly. “D'you think I *want* to go to Malfoy's house after what happened the *last* time I was

there? It's literally a place of nightmares for me. But what about Teddy? He needs you way more than I do. If you get arrested, who will take care of him?"

Remus's eyes flooded with guilt. Then tears.

The sight of witnessing such a strong man cry nearly broke Harry's resolve. Harry felt Remus's hand tense as his alpha blinked, and fat tears dripped down his cheeks. Harry lifted his free hand to wipe them away without a word, and pressed a gentle kiss to Remus's lips.

"It'll be okay, love, I *promise*," Harry murmured, but it was clear that Remus did not believe him.

~*~

With shaking hands, Harry silently packed up his clothes into a rucksack while Teddy continued to sleep peacefully in the centre of the master bed. Harry longed to wake him and say goodbye, but he did not have the heart to have Teddy witness his worst nightmares manifest into reality.

Harry knew that Remus would explain things to help ease the boy's mind—or tell him some sort of lie, like he'd gone on holiday, or went to see Ron and Hermione. Whatever his alpha decided to tell Teddy, Harry knew that he would do what needed to be done to minimize the trauma, and make things seem okay.

Until Harry came back.

And despite how terrified he was, Harry knew that he would return to Remus, and to Teddy.

Someday.

"O-Okay," Harry whispered to the two officials who had been watching him by the door. "I-I'm ready."

"Come with us, Omega."

Harry's stomach churned unpleasantly at them using his secondary sex as a title, but said nothing as he walked down the stairs with them, where Remus was standing by the door.

Remus said nothing, but looked at Harry with a lost, broken look in his eyes. Harry could read it easily; the silent plea for Harry to stay, but they both knew he couldn't. This was the lesser of the two evils—going willingly with these men instead of Remus being arrested, and Harry being forcibly taken away.

Harry could get through this—he knew that he could.

For his family.

The officials led Harry outside, past the house's warding magic, and Harry had just enough time to look back at Remus standing in the open door, a wriggling Bast in his arms, as though she had tried to dart out after Harry, before a hand closed around his wrist and he was dragged away from his family, his home, and his love in one wrenching moment of Side-Along Apparition.

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Though the men had not explicitly stated where they were going, Harry found himself wholly unsurprised when they reappeared outside of the Malfoy Manor.

Harry shivered, memories of the last time he'd been dragged here assaulting his mind—of his imprisonment, Hermione's torture, *Dobby*...

Harry shook his head minutely, and took a shuddering breath. He *refused* to show these men or Malfoy his fear.

The two Ministry officials escorted him to the gates. One of the men tapped the iron bars, and they swung open to admit them. They dragged Harry across the threshold, and towards the front door, where Lucius was already waiting.

Lucius looked the same as the last time Harry had seen him. His long blond hair was curtained around his shoulders, and he was dressed in fine robes of black velvet, complete with his black cane, which Harry knew contained his wand.

Worst of all, at least to Harry, was the look the older man was giving him—like Harry was some sort of confection that he was dying to sink his teeth into.

Harry swallowed thickly, and fought back a shiver.

“Ah, Mr North and Mr Perch,” Lucius said, his smooth tone of voice like poisoned wine. “I thank you for bringing the omega into my...*humble care*.”

Lucius handed them each a large sack, and the way it clinked as it exchanged hands told Harry immediately that it was bribe money. More chilling still was how Lucius seemed to have no problem displaying it in front of Harry, as though his witnessing of such a crime meant nothing to him.

The two men pocketed the gold, and herded Harry forward, not letting him go until Lucius's hand closed around Harry's wrist, the contact making him shudder with revulsion.

The two men left without a word, and Lucius dragged Harry bodily across the threshold before he shut the door, never once letting go of him. Lucius's eyes were predatory, hungry,

and Harry felt sick to his stomach as he tugged on Lucius's hold, only for Lucius to grip him tighter, almost to the point of pain.

“Welcome, little omega,” Lucius purred, turning to Harry with a nasty smirk, his movements making it clear that he wished to draw Harry's closer, but in the same breath a look of absolute disgust crossed his face. He choked, and brought a handkerchief up to cover his mouth and nose.

“By all the *saints*, Potter, when was the last time you *bathed*?” Lucius spat angrily, pushing Harry away from him, making him stumble, and stunning Harry as he tried to wrap his head around Lucius's sudden disgust. *Bathed? I showered yesterday*, Harry thought incredulously, even as Lucius began to shout again. “Dipsy! Dipsy, come here, *now*!”

With a sharp *crack*, a house elf appeared. She was dressed in a pretty chequered dress that seemed to have been a tea towel at one time, with all the telltale attributes of a house elf—luminous green eyes, batlike ears, and a thin, pencil-shaped nose.

“Master called?” she chirped, her voice reminding Harry of a canary, while Lucius scowled and pointed an angry finger at Harry.

“Take Mr Potter to the upstairs bathrooms. Have him bathed thoroughly, use perfumes, and give him the robes I had purchased for him to wear. I will not have *my* omega traipsing around in such *rags*.” Lucius glared at Harry again, as though his mere presence was an affront to him, before he turned in a swirl of dark robes, and stalked off.

“What—” Harry began, but yelped as the little elf began to immediately shunt him towards the stairs.

“Come, come, Mr Harry Potter!” the elf chirped, “it is time for you to get clean for Master Lucius!”

“But I *am* clean!” Harry protested, stumbling a little as his ankle hit the first stair before he righted himself and began to ascend, with the house elf still on his heels. “I showered yesterday!”

“If Master Lucius says you is dirty, then you is dirty!” the elf proclaimed. “Even if we cannot smell it. Master Lucius is descended from a long line of pureblood wizards, and his nose is most sensitive!”

“*Most inbred, more like*,” Harry muttered as he resigned himself to being herded upstairs and to the unneeded bath.

As Harry had anticipated, the bathroom was ridiculous.

Though the bath was not as large as the one in the Hogwarts Prefects' Bathroom, it was still fairly large, round, constructed of pearl-white marble and sunk into the floor, with a gold

lion's head for a tap, and a number of cosmetics lined the mirrored vanity nearby, many more than seemed necessary.

When the house elf caught Harry eyeing the bottles, she shook her head, making her ears flap.

"No, No, No, Harry Potter," she said sternly, almost like a mother admonishing her child. "Those is for Master Draco when he comes to visit. You mustn't touch those."

"Oh." Harry paused, and his hands tightened into fists. "Does he...er...visit often?"

"Master Draco comes to call every few weeks," the elf chirped happily, as though the idea of seeing Draco Malfoy was some sort of great privilege for her. "Now please come, Harry Potter. You must wash."

Harry wasn't exactly keen to get naked in this place, but playing along seemed a better option than defying the elf. It wasn't *her* fault that he was here, after all, and in addition, he didn't want to risk doing anything that might inadvertently hurt Remus.

Whatever else happened, he *had* to get back to Remus and Teddy in one piece.

With a defeated sigh, Harry locked the bathroom door, asked the elf to turn around, and proceeded to shed his clothes while he ran the bathwater as hot as he could stand it.

Like most magical tubs, it filled abnormally quickly, and when he sank into the almost blisteringly hot water, he could not help but exhale a soft sigh of relaxation. Despite his dire circumstances, he had to admit that it felt nice.

Harry shook his head minutely, and scowled. He couldn't think *anything* of this was nice, not when he was away from Remus, and in the arms of someone like *Malfoy*.

The elf turned around when he was fully submerged, and began to wash him like he was an infant. His hair was thoroughly scrubbed with shampoo, then run through with a conditioner that made his hair disentangle and soften. A rough, gritty cream was applied to his skin, then wiped off before the elf washed him with mint-scented soap from head to toe.

Harry told the elf to turn again as he stood up to rinse the last of the non-existent grime from his skin and hair, then wrapped a fluffy towel around his waist before he stepped out of the tub.

The elf pampered him further, applying creams and scents to his skin. She ran some sort of concoction through his hair that made it smell like cedar and soft to the touch. No longer did it look like its usual mess in the mirror, but almost artfully tousled.

"Here is your robes, Harry Potter," the elf offered once she'd finished, and Harry immediately let out a noise of disgust when he saw what the elf was holding out to him.

"He wants me to wear *that*?" Harry demanded, staring incredulously at the piece of clothing. It was made of some sort of shiny black material, the space from the waist upwards was

visibly tight, and though the skirt of the robes was straight and masculine, there was still a distinctive *dress* feel to it, like he was being handed a set of women's clothing.

“Yes, Harry Potter,” Dipsy replied, nodding her head, “Master Lucius commands it.”

“I'm not wearing that,” Harry retorted before he could think better of it. “It looks like a *dress*.”

“Master Lucius commands that you wear it, Harry Potter!” the elf cried, her voice almost tearful. “If Harry Potter refuses, then Dipsy has failed her duties, and must punish herself.”

The words were a cold reminder of what awaited the elf if Harry misbehaved, and he felt his stomach turn over with guilt.

His eyes downcast, Harry snatched up the robes and began to hastily tug them on.

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As Harry had predicted, the robes were *ridiculous*.

It was either designed for a smaller man, or intentional to show off every single aspect of Harry's upper body, so tight that Harry could hardly move his arms, much less hope to succeed in escaping Lucius's greasy clutches, should he decide to have another go at him.

Dipsy led Harry back downstairs, his rucksack reluctantly left behind in the bathroom, but his wand hidden in his robes pocket. Knowing Lucius, he would definitely need it.

Lucius was sitting in the parlour, reading a copy of the *Daily Prophet* while he nursed a cup of tea.

When Harry stepped into the room, he instinctively crossed his arms self-consciously across his chest in an effort to hide himself from Lucius, and he could all but hear the clothing's stitches groan in protest to the action.

“My omega, don't you look *lovely*,” Lucius purred as he set aside his paper and drink, and stood up.

“I'm not your *anything*,” Harry countered as he narrowed his eyes. “I know you did something to force those Omega Office people to have me taken away, but mark my words, I won't be staying here long.”

“Oh, did I?” Lucius asked as he stalked closer. “You have no proof, omega.”

“I *saw* you give those men hush money,” Harry said, taking a small step back as he glared at the older man. “I might have sight problems, but I'm not *blind*, Malfoy. I know what I saw.”

“You saw nothing,” Lucius replied dismissively, and frowned when he saw Harry shift backwards again. “Be still,” he commanded, using his Alpha Voice, and to Harry's horror, his body seemed to freeze in place.

Harry felt his stomach roil and skin crawl as Lucius's foul hands danced across his forearms, up his biceps, then across his upper chest. He shuddered, trying to fight off the command, but nothing he did made any difference—it was as though Lucius had cast the Full-Body Bind on him, and yet somehow even more effective.

“You're mine now, Potter,” Lucius purred, his hands dropping to Harry's waist and pulling him close. “You'll never see that foul werewolf or his flea-bitten little brat *ever* again.” Harry opened his mouth to respond, but Lucius cut him off, once more using his Alpha Voice to control him. “Silence. You do not need to speak, Omega.”

Harry felt his skin burn with shame as how *small* Lucius's words made him feel with so little effort. He felt disgusting, like no amount of washing would ever rid him of the feel of Lucius's hands on him, and his poisonous words made it worse. He could duel the man with no problem, but against his Alpha Voice, he was powerless.

Quite suddenly, Lucius let out a snarl of anger, and shoved Harry away. Due to the constrictive nature of the garment he could not control his fall very well, and with a grunt, he fell onto the plush sheepskin rug beneath him in a heap.

“I thought I told you to *bathe*, Potter!” he barked angrily, “not drench yourself in perfumes to hide it!”

“I *did* bathe, you git!” Harry snapped back with equal anger. “Your house elf gave me the works.”

“Do not lie to me, Potter,” Lucius snarled angrily. “You smell disgusting to me. You must bathe. *Now*.”

Perplexed, frustrated, and pushed unwillingly by the Alpha Voice, Harry pulled himself to his feet, and stalked from the room for yet another bath, and a tendril of relief wove into his fear, lessening it somewhat.

At the very least, it kept him away from Lucius.

Despite the blessed reprieve however, Harry knew that he was merely delaying the inevitable.

After all, he'd have to come back out eventually.

Contact

Chapter Notes

A/N: Next update is scheduled for April 21st. Enjoy! :)

Content/Trigger Warning: Voyeurism, Magical Coercion, Sexual Abuse, Abortion Ideation, Noncon (but not penetrative rape)

Chapter Thirteen – Contact

Harry had made certain to count how many baths he had so that when he finally got back to Remus they could have a good laugh about it.

In the first two days, Harry had had eight baths.

It was almost funny at first. For whatever reason, Lucius could not stand the scent of him. Harry wasn't entirely certain why this was, but after a time the humour of it began to wear off, and a dull melancholy replaced it.

Life at the Malfoy Manor, as it would turn out, was terribly lonely. Lucius couldn't come near him without disgust, and the house elf only came around to bathe him, and never spoke to Harry much, unless it was to 'correct' his snide remarks towards Lucius.

It was lonely, but at least the baths kept Harry out of Lucius's bed, which was a small mercy.

Instead, he spent his nights in a guest bedroom that was just past Lucius's quarters. It was close enough that the reek of the foul alpha still seemed to cling to every surface, making Harry's head ache and his heart long for Remus.

In that time, he'd learnt that the control of the Alpha Voice seemed to be terrifyingly absolute. Lucius had no problem making Harry do whatever he pleased, including disarming Harry with a mere four words.

“Drop your wand, Potter.”

The clatter of wood on wood was almost deafening, and yet, perhaps in a bid to make Harry believe that Lucius could be trusted, he never took away his wand permanently. Instead he left Harry to fend for himself for the bulk of the day, the house elf feeding and bathing him more than enough, allowing him plenty of sleep, and giving him virtually everything a person could want.

When he wasn't trying to accost Harry, that is.

To Lucius's dismay however, what Harry truly wanted, more than anything, had not changed.
He still wanted Remus.

~*~

A week into Harry's imprisonment, and during one of his latest bids to try and work out how to break through the complex warding Lucius had set up to keep him from running away, Harry was called by Lucius yet again.

Reluctantly, Harry pulled on the stupid robes that the elf laid out for him (emerald green fitted garments that felt more like a second skin than clothing) and he followed the elf.

To Lucius's bedroom.

Harry staggered to a stop, even as the door swung open and the elf scampered off to see to her other duties, he felt frozen to the spot. Lucius had yet to call him to his bedroom before.

“Enter, Potter.”

It was the Voice, and Harry's heart jumped into his throat as he tried to dig in his heels to stop himself, even as he began to walk, making him stagger and stumble as he walked into the room.

Blind shock eclipsed Harry's fear.

He'd *fought* the voice.

Just for a second, but there was no doubt that he'd finally *done* it.

Harry swallowed his surprise, keen for Lucius to *not* notice his expression and do something even worse than the Voice to keep Harry in line.

The alpha himself was laid out on a bed of silk, sipping brandy, and eyeing Harry hungrily, his gaze laced with an anger that made Harry tremble with fear.

“Potter,” he purred silkily. “Despite your...shortcomings, I shall not allow you to inhibit me from getting what I paid for. If I cannot touch you, I shall *watch* you.”

“I—I beg your pardon?”

“Disrobe.”

“What? *No!*” Harry sputtered, eyes wide with panic as he took a terrified step back from the older man.

“Do not make me use my Voice on you, Potter,” Lucius warned as he growled, “disrobe. *Now.*”

“And I said *no*,” Harry countered angrily. “I’m not letting your filthy eyeballs get even a *glance* at me like that.”

Harry crossed his arms across his chest to maximise his point, and Lucius smirked a little, easing back in his bed, as though Harry's refusal did not worry him in the least.

“Disrobe, Potter.”

Harry's heartbeat tripled in an instant as his hands moved of their own accord to the fastenings on the ridiculous robes that Lucius had forced him into.

No, no... Harry thought, his breath escaping him in short pants just barely below hyperventilating, but despite his best efforts, he could not shake off the command.

But I did before, just for a moment, Harry thought, his fingers now halfway down the front of the robes. *What did I do differently? Why can't I shake it off now?*

Harry thought to his wand, and tried to divert his hands, maybe to grab it and hex Lucius, but his limbs would not listen to him, and instead continued on their trek down his front.

“Stop.”

Harry breathed out a sigh of relief at the command, his fingers stopping at the buttons just below his navel.

The garment hung off his shoulders precariously, though far from suddenly adopting a conscience, it seemed as though Lucius merely wanted to look, and drink in Harry's exposed upper body.

Harry's skin crawled as he narrowed his eyes at the older man, disgust radiating off him as he tried to move farther away, but Lucius merely flicked his wand at him lazily, and he felt his feet freeze in place, as though they'd been glued to the floor.

“Disrobe,” Lucius repeated, his tone almost bored.

Harry felt sickened with himself as he unwillingly shouldered out of the garment, and it pooled upon the floor around his ankles. He stood in just his pants, shifting uncomfortably while he tried to shield himself from Lucius's wandering eyes.

“Remove your undergarments, Potter,” Lucius commanded using his Alpha Voice, and to Harry's horror and shame, he felt tears begin to well in his eyes. He was furious, scared, and deeply upset with both Lucius and himself, even as he valiantly tried to fight the command, his limbs stuttered, trying to obey and stop at the same time.

“L-Lucius, please,” Harry said, and he felt positively sickened with himself for how pitiful he sounded, but he couldn't help it—for the first time in his life, he was truly *afraid* of Lucius

Malfoy; he *didn't* want to do this. “You *have* to know that this isn't right...I belong to someone else. I have *his* mark, a-and...and...I don't...I can't...just, please, *stop this!*”

Lucius narrowed his eyes. At first, Harry hoped that his pleas had gotten to the older man, but then, he bared his teeth, almost like a rabid dog trying to assert his dominance.

“Were you not listening, Potter?” he snarled, “I said, *disrobe. Now!*”

Lucius's eyes were bulging with anger, but something else seemed to be glimmering behind the ferocity—an odd sort of panic, even as Harry's hands moved of their own accord to the elastic of the undergarments, and despite his best efforts to stop himself, he exposed himself fully to his gaoler.

“Oh, *yes*,” Lucius said, laughing, and making Harry burn with shame. “That's right, little omega, now, touch yourself.”

“No,” Harry protested, feeling positively sick at the quavering, pitiful lilt to his voice. “I *won't*.”

“Touch yourself, *now*,” Lucius repeated, this time using his Voice.

Anger flared in Harry at the indignity of it, and his hands faltered again. He glared at Lucius, furious that he had been reduced to this, and in the same breath, a realization hit him.

Anger is the key to fighting the Voice. Not anguish.

“Potter! I told you to touch yourself!” Lucius snarled, his voice so sudden that it made Harry jump, and he lost his hold on his fight.

He obeyed.

Under the pressure of fear and anguish over the humiliation of his actions, as well as Lucius's Voice, Harry closed a hand over his limp cock, and began to stroke it.

Harry tried to find his anger again, something—*anything*—to help him fight off Lucius's power over him, but to his shame, he found that he was too terrified to be properly angry.

Lucius let out a filthy moan that made Harry's skin crawl, and when he glanced up, he saw that the older man had taken his own cock out, and was touching himself. It did not seem to matter that Harry was as limp as a eunuch, not aroused in the slightest by the ordeal, but merely the act of touching himself seemed enough for the cruel older man.

When Lucius came, he told Harry dismissively that he could leave, and Harry raced for the door so fast that he almost forgot his clothes (and by extension, his wand) in his haste.

When Harry made it back to his room, he quickly shed the foul robes. He changed into a pair of striped pyjama bottoms, an old T-shirt that Ron had given him as a joke that read, *Bitches Love Quidditch*, as well as an old Weasley jumper.

The layers of familiar clothing were soothing, like Harry's family wasn't yet lost to him.

Harry climbed onto the bed, his entire body trembling, and though he longed to scrub the feeling of Lucius's eyes off his skin, he feared exposing himself again—what if Lucius changed his mind, and tried to do something *worse*, despite his continued inability to tolerate Harry's scent at close range?

Harry absolutely hated his fear—what had happened to his courage?

Why was Lucius able to break him down so easily, when Voldemort never could?

Harry inhaled slowly, his breath shaking, but the slow inhalations did not aid in calming him down, and he let out a tiny sob of despair.

He missed his *family*.

With tears streaking his cheeks, Harry lifted his wand. It felt foolish to try, but after a week of confinement, he was desperate to hear from Remus.

“*Expecto Patronum*,” Harry whispered, concentrating on all the happy moments with Remus and Teddy, allowing that feeling to fill him, and banishing the shadows of Lucius Malfoy from his mind.

Thankfully, it seemed to work. However, instead of the expected stag bursting from Harry's wand, a wolf pup leapt out, gambolling and tumbling through the air like a true puppy might.

Harry felt his face flush a little, uncertain both *why* his Patronus had changed, and why it had taken on such a childlike form. In spite of his shock however, Harry knew that he would need to focus in order to send the talking Patronus properly, and pushed aside his confusion for the moment.

“*I miss you, Remus*,” Harry whispered, flicking his wand once more to send the pup off, and it scampered away with its tongue hanging out of its mouth, as though it was eager to send the message.

Harry smiled as he watched it go, and sat up a little as it sank through the Manor's wall, reappearing in the gardens. Harry watched from the window as it scampered across the lawn and past the Manor's gates.

Relief suffused Harry's being, and he sank back onto the bed, both confused and pleased that it had worked. If Lucius had been so paranoid about Harry escaping, why hadn't he thought of this? Certainly it should have occurred to him that Harry would try to contact Remus when Lucius wasn't nearby to supervise?

Harry slumped back farther onto the bed, confusion and anxiety burning a hole in his stomach and making him feel sick. At the same moment, a wolf Patronus burst through his wall, making him jump, and it spoke to Harry in a wonderfully familiar tone of voice.

“*I miss you too, Harry. Please be strong, I am doing all that I can to get you out of there. I love you.*”

Harry bit his lip, his eyes filming over with tears as he watched the wolf fade away, like snowflakes caught on the wind.

Harry glanced to the door of the bedroom, and when he was confident that he heard no sound beyond it, he quietly cast the charm again.

“Is Teddy okay?”

Harry sent his wolf pup off, and within minutes, a response came.

“He thinks you’re visiting with Ron and Hermione,” the Patronus said. “Maybe it was wrong, but I couldn’t bring myself to tell him what actually happened; I don’t want to hurt him with the truth. He misses you, though, and asks about you every day.”

“Give him a big hug for me,” Harry replied, his voice thick with emotion. “I love you both so much. I can’t wait to be home.”

Harry sent off his Patronus, but when Remus’s response came, it was with a question that was abrupt, but not wholly unexpected.

“Has Lucius done anything that I should know about?”

The tone of the question was light, but it still gave Harry pause. He didn’t want to lie to Remus, but neither did he want him to worry, or perhaps do something that might impede him from getting Harry out of the Manor faster—like hexing Lucius into oblivion. Harry felt that the old, sick fuck had it coming regardless, but his goal was to get back to his alpha, not make the Ministry believe Remus was unfit to adequately care for an omega.

“He can’t touch me,” Harry replied at last. “In the literal sense, I mean—seems like something in my scent bothers him, and he can’t get within five feet of me without getting angry. He’s not been exactly pleasant, but he hasn’t really hurt me yet. It’s nothing I can’t handle.”

Harry’s stomach churned with guilt as he sent off the Patronus. Watching it frolic through the air gave him hope despite his worries—hope that despite how horrible he felt now, it made him feel as though he’d get out of this awful place in the end.

No matter what it took.

~*~

Harry woke late the next day, having spent the night and early morning conversing with Remus. It felt good, and made Harry feel stronger—he no longer felt alone in this house; there were people outside willing to fight for him, and who *truly* loved him. It gave him the strength he needed to face whatever was to come, knowing that the time he spent in this new hell was impermanent, and would likely end sooner, rather than later.

Harry dressed in his own clothes that morning, still not too keen to bathe and thus expose himself to the risk of Lucius watching him while he washed. The man had not done such a

thing yet, but after the previous night, it felt as though no act was too foul for the older man to enact.

Once Harry had made it out of the room, he paused on the stairs when he heard Lucius shouting.

Curiosity piqued, Harry soundlessly padded down the rest of the stairs, and tiptoed towards the sound of the voices, for now he could discern two—Lucius, and a stranger.

Harry stopped outside the parlour doors, tucking himself into an alcove that would hopefully dampen the likelihood of his omega scent seeping into the room, and thus inform Lucius that Harry was eavesdropping.

“So, you're telling me that you *won't* do it?” Lucius asked coldly, paired with a rustling sound of robes, giving Harry the impression that Lucius was pacing.

“I didn't say I *wouldn't*, I said it would be *inadvisable*,” the unfamiliar voice said. “If this gets out, even you would not be able to bribe yourself into good standing again. Doing something like this without the consent of the omega in question...it can be *tricky*.”

“You listen to me,” Lucius growled, “I was the fool who did not recognize those putrid pheromones when that little *tramp* walked into my home. I was told he had not yet had a heat—you are the *supposed* Healer—tell me how this is possible!”

“Under stress, it is not uncommon for an omega to show no signs of heat, or, alternatively, have multiple heats in one month,” the stranger said patiently, like he was explaining the concept to a child. “It is likely the stress got to him, and he did not show signs of his heat, and thus his alpha took no precautions against—”

“—*I am his alpha, you fool!*” Lucius snarled. “Not that mangy *beast* who plays at being human. Potter *cannot* be pregnant! I won't allow it!”

“Without properly examining him I cannot be certain, but the particular scent deterrent you are describing only occurs in pregnant omegas, not simply mated ones,” the healer said, apparently unruffled by Lucius's antagonism. “And I won't risk my career over this, Lucius. I just barely avoided Azkaban after the war, I'll not jeopardize myself or my family because your silly little scheme went pear-shaped.”

He must be a former Death Eater, Harry thought as he furrowed his brow, and tried to pinpoint his voice, though he couldn't recognize it. He put his confusion over this to the side however as Lucius began to speak again, for the moment trying to swallow the numb shock over what they were discussing.

“You *owe* me for what I did for you,” Lucius insisted, his voice just barely below an angry shout. “If you are unwilling to simply terminate it, find me someone who will!”

“I *can't!*” the man shouted back. “Haven't you been *listening*? Doing an under-the-table abortion on an unwilling omega would be bad enough, but when that omega also happens to be *Harry Potter*? No one in the *country* would ever be willing to do that, regardless who the alpha is.”

Lucius began to shout expletives at the man, his words and threats so jumbled and nonsensical that Harry had a hard time following it.

Or, perhaps, what he was hearing was finally beginning to sink in.

Somehow, impossibly, he was *pregnant*.

Harry got back up, and tiptoed from the door, moving as soundlessly as possible until he was certain he was far enough that he would not be overheard, then raced up the stairs and away from his captor.

As he ran, Harry couldn't help but smile, relief flooding him as he moved.

If he could just tell Remus, then he'd get out of here.

Even better than that, he'd get to go *home*.

Harry stopped inside the bedroom he'd been staying in, panting hard from the short run. He ran a hand across his flat stomach, and grinned, the panic of what had accidentally happened, and what was to come, not fully registering with him yet. For the moment, he was stuck on a strange sort of relief and gratitude—his *baby* had saved him from Lucius's filthy clutches all along.

“Okay, kid,” Harry whispered, “here's the plan—you stay right there, don't die on me, all right? I'll protect you, I promise. I won't let that scum take you away, and I'll check *all* my food and drink, to make sure he can't slip me anything and make you disappear. You need to work on growing, because I want you to meet your dad and your big brother. This is...I mean, it's *barmy*! Not long ago I didn't think this was even possible, and...well, you know, right? This whole thing is completely mad, but if you keep me safe from *his* slimy paws, I'll keep you safe, okay? I won't let anything happen to you.”

Harry slid down the door, falling into a heap just inside the bedroom.

He'd tell Remus tonight, after he figured out what to say. After the implication of what *pregnancy* truly meant for him and his family finally sank in properly.

There would be time enough to panic about the more serious bits.

Later.

The Visitor

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hey guys, next update is scheduled for...ye gods, May 5th. The next time I update this, I will be 30 ;_; (My birthday is May 3rd, lmao) Happy Easter, everyone!

Content Warning: Implied Sexual Abuse/Voyeurism

Chapter Fourteen – The Visitor

Harry's second week in the Malfoy Manor was no less awful than the first, and compounded by Lucius's nightly commands that Harry *give him a show*.

Every night it left Harry feeling almost physically sick. Afterwards, he would either layer on more clothing than was necessary, all of which still smelt faintly of *home*, or he would bathe behind a locked and warded door until he had nearly scrubbed his skin raw.

Despite the horrible experiences with Lucius, somehow they hurt less when he was able to talk to Remus every night, after he was certain that Lucius had gone to sleep.

Although, his first conversation following his *discovery* certainly could have gone a little better.

“Pregnant? Are you certain, Harry? How do you feel about it? Are you all right?”

“I'm fine, love, and yes, I'm pretty sure. Why else would Lucius not be able to get near me? I'd be happier about it if I was home, though. Besides, it's definitely yours. Do you think this will help to get me home sooner?”

“I don't know, Harry. I will speak to the Barrister I have helping me with this, though I am hopeful that it will indeed help. Once you're home, you can decide what you want to do about it. I will not ask you now; I do not think it would be fair to speak on it one way or the other while you are there. Just take care of yourself; everything else can wait.”

“Don't be so thick—of course I want to keep it. Give Teddy a baby brother or sister with the man I love? Sure, it's definitely sooner than I'd expected, but I knew that I wanted kids eventually. I don't need to think about it, I know what I want.”

“All the same, Harry, give yourself some time. I love you, and I don't want you to feel obligated to keep it just for Teddy or for me.”

Not all their conversations had been as serious as that first one, but it was the most memorable.

Harry liked how Remus cared for him so much, even when he came off as somewhat belittling. However, Harry had a feeling that part of Remus's encouragement for him to *really think about it* was due to the fact that it was rather difficult for Harry to completely convey how much he wanted this child through nothing more than a Patronus.

Harry knew that Remus loved Teddy, and would not protest to more children in the house. In this particular instance however, Harry had a feeling that his concern stemmed from worry about pushing Harry towards something he might not truly be ready for, rather than Remus trying to tell Harry what to do with his body.

“It's okay, kid,” Harry whispered to his stomach every time Remus insisted that Harry take more time to think about it. “Your Daddy...er...*other Daddy* loves you, he just wants to make sure that I take care of me, too...” Harry trailed off and ran a hand across his stomach as he laughed weakly. “Er, I think. I hope.”

The following day, it began as every other—Harry woke, dressed in as many layers as he could get away with, and went to the kitchens for food. He ate only after he checked every food item and drink for potions tampering, and upon finding nothing, ate.

Harry passed the day alone, not daring to try and contact Remus when Lucius was up and about. However, his new normalcy was ripped away from him in the early evening when he wandered back into the bedroom he'd been using, and found the house elf waiting for him.

“Good evening, Harry Potter,” she greeted, “Master Lucius and Master Draco requests your presence for dinner, and Master Lucius asks that I prepare you.”

“Draco is here?” Harry asked weakly, and Dipsy nodded.

“Indeed, sir,” she said, “he is visiting with Master Lucius. Master Lucius requires your presence for dinner, and I must prepare you.”

“Prepare me,” Harry said hollowly after Dipsy had finished repeating herself. “So...the works again?”

“Dipsy must wash Harry Potter, and make him presentable for Master Draco's visitation,” she explained, and Harry grimaced.

One Malfoy had been bad enough—but with the presence of the Alpha Voice, how would he fare against *two*?

~*~

Dipsy forced Harry into a bath, and he was scrubbed within an inch of his life. His finger and toenails were trimmed, his face was tended to for the removal of blackheads and blemishes, his hair was styled, and he was forced into a set of deeply uncomfortable fitted dark green robes, albeit more conservative than most of Lucius's clothing choices thus far.

Harry reluctantly descended the stairs and headed for the dining room, a sour look on his face as he went. The last time he'd seen Draco Malfoy was just after the war during the Death Eater Trials. Their meetings had been awkward, but not as openly hostile as it could have been.

At the very least they hadn't tried to hex each other, which Harry would qualify as a success.

The low thrum of voices bled out to Harry before he made it to the room, and he took a breath to brace himself for whatever was to come before he crossed the dining room's threshold.

“Potter,” Draco immediately greeted, without waiting for his father to introduce him. His voice was aloof, but not as cold as Harry had expected it to be.

“Malfoy,” Harry greeted in a similar tone, and Draco smirked, his expression almost approving.

“Sit,” Draco said, enunciating each syllable in a pointed sort of way, as though Harry was an imbecile.

Harry pursed his lips, sitting down reluctantly across from Draco, while Lucius sat at the head of the table. Harry felt a modicum of vindictive pleasure when he saw Lucius's lip curl in disgust as he inched away from Harry, as though his scent was still disgusting to him.

Draco, in contrast, didn't react beyond arching his brow, first at Harry, then at his father, as though he knew something the rest of them didn't. At the same moment, Harry noticed that the scent coming off of Draco was not the sharp tang of an alpha, but something calming and more pleasant—that of a beta.

Harry shifted uncomfortably, not liking the idea of being *calmed* by Draco Malfoy in any capacity.

“My, Father, how well-trained your omega is,” Draco remarked, and Harry blinked in confusion at the odd lilt of his voice—an accent that was not entirely English, though it was apparent that this was due to wherever he had been living abroad, more than any other reason. “I had no idea it was possible to find one who could stand to be in your presence for more than five seconds.”

“Draco,” Lucius said, his tone heavy with warning, just as three glasses of champagne appeared on table. “Your mother’s unpleasant remarks can hardly be considered a statement which speaks for *all* omegas.”

Harry hesitated when he spotted the alcohol on the table, a hand moving to his flat stomach uncertainly. Wasn’t someone *in his condition* supposed to avoid alcohol?

Lucius glared at Harry, as though daring him to turn up his nose at the drink, and in a bid to avoid having The Voice used on him at the table, Harry reluctantly sipped the champagne as he listened to the father and son fling barbs at each other casually. The drink was good, but hardly helped to settle his nerves, even as the courses began to roll in.

It became quickly apparent to Harry that this was to be a very fancy sort of dinner—the kind the Ministry might host and generally took three or four hours to complete. The champagne was followed by plates of chilled oysters with lemon and capers on beds of ice, three per person, followed by a beef consommé, an endive salad with light citrus dressing, gnocchi with a heavy cream sauce, lemon sorbet, roasted duck with gravy, garlic runner beans, chocolate mousse, and Mille-feuille with strawberries, followed by after-dinner tea.

As they ate, Harry dutifully checked every course for potions or other forms of tampering by flicking his wand under the table, but thankfully found none.

It was over the duck that Draco seemed to have enough of his father’s attitude, when Lucius made a stab at Draco’s *shameful* job for the third time.

“I am a fully-qualified healer, Father,” Draco snapped, his fork trembling in his hand like he wanted nothing more than to slam it down and storm off. “I had to get my qualifications in *France* because no one in Wizard Britain would take me on after all the trouble you caused and dragged me and Mother through. *How* in the name of Merlin is that *shameful*?”

“If you are qualified, why do you work in such low conditions, Draco?” Lucius asked, calm and unruffled, as though Draco’s icy tone did not bother him in the least. “I do not understand why you would wish to work in that...that...*place*.”

“I do not seek the grandeur I once did,” Draco retorted stiffly. “I work at a Dragon Sanctuary in Romania, treating the people employed there. It is not a hospital, but the pay *more* than suffices. Tell me again how that is *shameful*?”

Draco’s cheeks flushed pink, and he did not meet his father’s eye. Harry raised his eyebrows; he knew that look.

Draco was hiding something.

More than that, Harry knew of the sanctuary Draco had mentioned without him even having to name it.

Harry wondered, vaguely, if Draco worked with Charlie.

I doubt it, Harry thought with a slight shake of his head. *The Weasleys hate the Malfoys. Everyone knows that.*

“It is not a hospital,” Lucius pointed out icily, “or any other well-regarded establishment. I speak on this only because I am *concerned* for you, Draco, no other reason.”

“Naturally, Father,” Draco replied smoothly. “Because house arrest for Death Eater activities is not as shameful as being a healer outside of a hospital setting. Just *what* was I thinking?”

Harry watched Lucius visibly grind his teeth.

It was going to be a long evening.

~*~

At ten o'clock, Harry was finally able to leave the table, much to Lucius's displeasure. Clearly, Lucius had wanted Harry on his arm as a show of power, but given that he still couldn't stand the scent of him, it had made things not exactly go the alpha's way.

Harry raced upstairs, already fumbling with the throat of his robes, fantasizing about changing into something less ridiculous and more comfortable.

However, Harry was impeded from changing his clothes when he raced into the room and found someone waiting there for him.

“Potter,” Draco greeted, stretched out on the settee in front of the fireplace, and he was nursing a glass of scotch.

“Malfoy,” Harry retorted, “what do you want?”

“Nothing at all,” Draco replied smoothly, “come sit with me, Potter. Have a drink. I have no plans to hex you—yet.”

“Er...” Harry bit his lip, thinking of his pregnancy. Draco arched a brow, almost in challenge. “Er...no thanks.”

“How very interesting,” Draco replied, though the aloof tone made it difficult for Harry to discern if Draco actually found it interesting. “I saw you checking all your food at dinner, though Father appeared too wrapped up in himself to notice. Father can't get near you because your scent seems to bother him, and to top it all off you won't drink with me. My, my, my...why could that be?”

“I have no idea what you're on about, Malfoy—”

“—I know it's not Father's,” Draco interrupted. “It would be Lupin's then, am I right?”

“Yes,” Harry replied on reflex, then winced when he realised what he'd said. “Wait, no, I mean...*fuck*.”

“My, my, my...” Draco said, repeating his sentiment from earlier, while his eyes glimmered with amusement. “How *fascinating*. My father owns an omega who is carrying the child of someone else. Oh, he must *love* that.”

“Lucius doesn't *own* me,” Harry snarled angrily, though Draco did not react to Harry's anger beyond draining the remainder of his drink, and setting the glass down upon the table.

“According to the Ministry, he does,” Draco replied as he eased back, folding his arms under his head, while he continued to gaze at Harry. “Funny thing, Ministry paperwork. If you know how to work with the system, it can say all *sorts* of things that aren't true. Like an omega being classified as beta, for example.”

Harry blinked.

What was Draco saying?

“You can't hide something like that,” Harry blurted out, and Draco chuckled, but did not move as he continued to regard Harry.

“With enough money and enough potions, you most certainly *can*,” Draco replied smoothly. “If, for example, one presents while at school, and they send a frantic letter to one's mother, knowing what would happen if their father were to find out. Naturally, he would want to marry the omega off to the first alpha who bid on him, like a head of cattle. In particular in the higher classes, unwed omegas are viewed as a burden, not any sort of gift. One's mother would know that, and know just whom to trust with such delicate information...such as an esteemed potions master with the capabilities to brew Omega-Masking Potion, making him appear, for all intents and purposes, like a beta.

“I know what Father is doing,” Draco continued as he stood up smoothly, locked his hands together at the small of his back, and began to pace before the fire. “He wants an omega who would grant him a position of power, or perhaps lessen his house arrest sentence. If the Ministry only knew how he was treating the *Saviour*; why, I would surmise that they would be quite angry with my father indeed.”

Draco did not explain further, and merely offered Harry a conspiratorial smirk. He swept from the room, and did not even pause to say goodbye.

Harry sat heavily upon the bed, awash with confusion.

Draco was an *omega*?

Or was he just trying to mess with Harry's head?

Harry didn't know.

Feeling a little dizzy, Harry hastily changed into his pyjamas, brushed his teeth, and climbed into bed. An hour later, he heard the front doors of the house slam, but who did it or why,

Harry did not know.

Harry flicked his wand to dim the lights in the room, set down his wand, and rolled over.

Maybe tomorrow would be a better day.

Somehow, Harry doubted it.

Harry sighed, staring ahead blankly, and his eyes fell upon a red ribbon wound around his wrist.

I forgot to send a Patronus to Remus! Harry realized with a sudden jolt, sitting up so sharply in bed that his head spun.

Still fighting off the dizziness, Harry fumbled on the nightstand for his wand, and flicked it while he whispered, “*Expecto Patronum.*”

“Draco came to visit his father. We managed to keep from hexing each other; I think he was too busy arguing with Lucius to pay me much mind, though he did spin my head a little after dinner was over. D’you think one glass of champagne would hurt the baby? I didn’t really have any way to refuse it.”

Harry spoke in a rush, nervous about being overheard as he sent off the Patronus, and the wolf pup happily scampered through the warding like it wasn’t there.

Within moments, Remus sent a response.

“No, Harry, I think it should be fine,” Remus replied, chortling warmly. *“Are you all right? Did Draco harm you in any way?”*

“No, he was just his usual annoying self. I’m fine; he said some weird stuff, but I don’t know what any of it means. Probably he was just trying to get a rise out of me.”

“Yes, that does sound like him. Try and get some rest, Harry, and I will speak to you tomorrow. I love you.”

The dismissal was sooner than Harry had expected—usually they would converse this way for hours. Harry supposed that Remus was probably tired, and brushed it off. He sent a quick, *“I love you too,”* back to his alpha, then settled down into the bed with a soft sigh.

He hoped he would get back to Remus soon.

~*~

Harry woke the next morning, his head feeling a little fuzzy, but not in an unfamiliar way that might cause him concern. Harry supposed the stress of the night before had got to him more

than he had realized. He sat up, rubbing his eyes as he tried to shake off his sleep.

At the same moment, Harry noted that the Manor was not the usual quiet it was in the morning—he could hear shouting coming from somewhere beyond the room, though the voices were so muffled that Harry could not hear what they were saying.

Ignoring the breakfast that had been laid out for him, Harry crammed his glasses on, jumped into a pair of jeans and one of his many jumpers, and grabbed his wand before he raced to the door to pull it open, which was when he ran into something of a problem—the door had been locked from the outside.

“*Alohomora!*” Harry cried, but predictably, it did not work, and he slapped himself on the forehead for his own stupidity. “I should've known that that wouldn't work. Okay, let's see here...”

Harry flicked his wand again, this time focusing on the threads of warding magic keeping the door firmly shut.

“Oh, okay,” Harry said as he recognized the spell. “A locking spell that only the caster can break, eh? Well, I might not be Hermione, but I think I can do this...”

Harry flicked his wand again, only to be blasted away from the door like a bomb had been set off, and he yelped in surprise, before he crumpled in a heap on top of the settee.

Shaken but unhurt, Harry stood up and brushed himself off, unwilling to be beaten by a *door*.

Standing farther back this time, Harry tried again, only to have the same result, though, luckily, he was far enough away that he was well out of striking range of the Blasting Hex, and it did not knock him back.

Harry tried again and again, using various spells in an effort to open the door, but nothing seemed to be working. He ground his teeth, unwilling to give up, when after an hour the shouting began to draw closer, though the words were so heavy muffled that Harry struggled to make them out.

“*Stow up!*” Harry thought he heard, though the voice was not Lucius's—of that he was certain. “*Stow up what he is!*”

“What?” Harry whispered, more to himself than anyone else, and shook his head. “Oh, show us where he is...right?”

Harry bit his lip, not quite daring to trust a hope. It could be the Ministry and Remus come to rescue him, but then, it could also be a group of former Death Eaters who were ready to have their sadistic way with him.

“*Here!*” he heard another voice call, once again so heavily muffled that he barely caught it.

Harry barely had time to wrap his head around this new development before the door was blasted off its hinges with the force of a rampaging bull, and Harry let out a little startled yelp as he jumped away, just in time to avoid colliding with the door that was flying at him.

When Harry at last looked up, he was privy to the most ridiculous and amazing scene just beyond the bedroom's threshold.

At the front of the group stood three Ministry wizards whom he did not know. Behind them, looking rather smug, was Draco.

At the very back, almost obscured by the others, was Remus.

Home Again

Chapter Notes

A/N: I AM SO SORRY FOR BEING LATE! Party weekend sucked up all my editing time ;_; Next update is scheduled for May 19th. Enjoy! :D

Chapter Fifteen – Home Again

Harry did not even hesitate when his eyes landed upon his mate. The Ministry officials and Draco thankfully had the good sense to move out of the way before Harry stampeded right over them, and he threw himself at Remus with so much force that the alpha grunted, letting out a soft little *oof!* as he staggered back, and chuckled a little as his arms wrapped around Harry.

“You're here,” Harry said, burying his face in Remus's neck, at last inhaling that familiar scent of *his* alpha after the longest fortnight of his *life*. “You're actually *here*...”

“I'm here, Harry,” Remus replied, holding him close as he scented Harry in turn, uncaring that they had an audience. “And you are coming home.”

“Oh, thank god, thank god, Remus...I missed you so much, I—”

Harry's voice caught as his eyes became damp, and he tucked his face farther into the crook of Remus's neck, not quite keen for Draco Malfoy to see his tears.

“Looks like you got one a' them baby bird omegas,” one of the Ministry workers said, though the words could have been demeaning, the tone of voice was warm and non-judgemental, though Harry still wasn't too pleased with his word choice. “Very cute.”

“He's still Harry Potter,” Remus replied mildly, “not merely *some omega*. You would do well to remember that.”

“I wouldn't mind forgetting it,” Draco muttered, apparently to himself, and Harry shivered with silent laughter.

“Come on,” Remus said softly as he pulled Harry back and smiled at him. “Are you ready to go home?”

“Yes,” Harry replied at once, making Remus chuckle, but Harry paused while he regarded Remus worriedly. “But...what about Lucius? What's going on with him?”

“Would you be content to wait until we got home before I tell the story?” Remus asked, “He has been arrested, properly this time, along with three others who were in on his little scheme. I would like to have you checked over before I give you the whole story, and Madam Pomfrey agreed to meet us at the house—I assumed you wouldn't want all the attention of going to St Mungo's at the moment.”

“You thought right,” Harry said with a weak laugh. “But...I *think* I can wait. You promise to tell me *everything*?”

“Everything,” Remus assured him, and pressed a kiss to Harry's temple. Draco scoffed, and rolled his eyes at the couple.

“If you two start shagging in my hallway, I will make *you* clean up the mess, Potter,” Draco sniped, and Harry could not help but laugh at that, at last lifting up his head to gaze and the blond omega.

This time, Harry could sense it more keenly, telling him that whatever Draco had been doing to disguise himself as a beta, he was not doing it now. He bore his omega status proudly; his scent was sweet, like apple blossoms, and along with it he bore a distinctive circular mark upon his throat, telling Harry that he was mated.

Remus moved with Harry back into the bedroom to gather his things, then, still arm in arm, they walked with the Ministry officials downstairs, and Draco in the lead.

As they moved, Harry's eyes again fell upon his former school rival, and he could not help but wonder who had the patience to actually take Malfoy a partner. Harry could barely stand being in the same room as him (though, admittedly, his feelings on that were changing after all that had happened), and to spend his *life* with someone like Malfoy...

Harry shivered involuntarily, and Remus chuckled, almost as though he could hear Harry's thoughts.

Downstairs were two more Ministry officials. They were standing sentry over Lucius's bound form. In addition to the bindings, a thin red rope had been tied around Lucius's neck, almost like a collar, and the older man looked furious.

Though Harry did not wish to show his fear to his former captor, he instinctively tucked himself more securely into Remus's embrace.

Remus's arm tensed around him, and he levelled a glare with Lucius, exuding a confidence that seemed to be edged with animosity, like Remus was daring Lucius to protest.

Harry should have known that that would not be enough to stop him.

“You...you...” Lucius snarled, enraged, “you *stole* my omega! You *filthy* half-breed!”

“He was never yours, Malfoy,” Remus replied coolly, his eyes narrowed into a glare. “Harry is his own person, and always has been. Your archaic attitude towards omegas and your

backhanded dealings have gotten you exactly what you deserve. I stole nothing from you; Harry *chose* me, and he continues to choose me. You have given him no reason to stay.”

“I’ll always choose Remus,” Harry added, smirking at Lucius in a silent taunt. “Between a half-breed and a pureblood? I’d go for the half-breed every time.”

Harry inclined his head to grin at Remus, whose eyes crinkled with silent mirth before he leant in to press a tender kiss to Harry’s lips.

“Come on, love,” Remus murmured softly, “let’s go home.”

Ignoring Lucius’s enraged insults, Harry and Remus rejoined the others, and they stepped out of Harry’s prison for the last time.

~*~

Harry was unwilling to let go of Remus as they walked.

It made their movements a little awkward, and Draco rolled his eyes more than once at Harry’s actions, but Harry didn’t care. He’d been without Remus for a full fortnight; he’d missed their fist full moon together, and he’d been away from his godson for *too* long. Regardless if it made him look silly or weak, Harry *refused* to let his mate go.

“We’re going to need you to come in to make a statement within the next few days,” one of the Ministry officials said to Harry, and nodded his head respectfully at the omega, as though in some odd misguided acknowledgement that he was still Harry Potter. “After that, we will send you a notice by owl for when the trial is scheduled. It could be a few months, at least.”

“I’m pregnant,” Harry said, ignoring the way Remus tensed next to him as he said it. “If it’s more than nine months from now, that’d be...better...I think?”

“Yeah, I can smell it,” the Ministry official replied with a wry smile. “We make allowances for pregnant people, and so we will do our best to arrange it for a time when they key witnesses are less...*indisposed*, but I can’t make any promises.”

“It’s appreciated nevertheless,” Remus added, his arm coiled around Harry securely, protectively. “We shall be in touch once Harry has been checked over.”

The Ministry official nodded, and motioned that they were free to go. Harry glanced up to Draco, and the blond smirked faintly, nodding his head once in acknowledgement.

Harry couldn’t quite pin his finger on it, but in that brief span of a moment, it almost felt as though he’d made a friend.

Smiling, Harry turned away from Draco, and happily followed Remus’s lead in Side-Along Apparition home.

~*~

“Uncle Harry, Uncle Harry, Uncle Harry, Uncle Harry, Uncle Harry, Uncle Harry!”

Teddy's high excited shrieks of his name flew from the tot's lips so fast that Harry could barely discern one word from the other, and he grunted as the boy leapt into his arms. The force of Teddy's hug made Harry fall back into Remus, who caught them both effortlessly in his arms.

“I missed you *so* much!” Teddy crowed, hugging Harry even tighter as he spoke. “Why were you at Auntie Hermione and Uncle Ron's for so long? They came here without you a whole bunch of times! Daddy was real scared and missed you so many! He even said a *bad* word one time, that's how much he missed you, and my food tasted sad without you here and *why* was you gone for so many sleeps?”

“Take a breath between questions, Ted,” Harry teased as he hefted the boy onto his hip, and began to carry him towards the front door, where Andromeda and Poppy Pomfrey were waiting. “I'm sorry I was gone so long. Some stuff happened, and...well...I'm back now, and I *definitely* won't be gone that long ever again.”

“Forever never?” Teddy asked, and Harry laughed.

“Forever never,” he affirmed, smiling as he hugged Teddy closer. “I'm so sorry for being gone so long, Teddy, really.”

“It's okay,” Teddy said. “Just never do it again.”

Harry laughed, and set Teddy down as they crossed the threshold into the little house. Immediately the boy hugged Harry's leg, as though he was afraid to let him go.

Harry hardly minded, feeling a warm sort of joy at Teddy's and Remus's closeness, and immediately reached down to ruffle the boy's violet locks.

“Come in, Harry,” Andromeda said, waving Harry towards the sofa, where a platter of tea and sandwiches was waiting for them. “And if my grandson can let you go, maybe Madam Pomfrey can check you over.”

Harry nodded, swallowing his laughter when he felt Teddy tighten his hold on his leg at his grandmother's words. Remus untangled himself from Harry more readily, but took his hand, and gently guided the omega over to the sofa.

When Harry sat down, Teddy climbed into his lap, and Harry chuckled, offering the boy a squeeze before he coaxed Teddy to sit next to him, though Teddy did not look at *all* pleased about this.

“Just for a minute, Ted,” Harry said reassuringly. “Then you can sit on me all day if you want.”

“Don't tempt him,” Remus murmured as he sat on Harry's other side, and Harry huffed a soft laugh.

“Harry,” Madam Pomfrey said as she moved up to him with her wand out, and offered him a small smile. “I wish I could say that it is good to see you again, but...”

“No, it's fine,” Harry interrupted, shaking his head, “it's good to see you too, Miss. I'm okay, more or less. Mostly I'm worried about...well...” he motioned to his stomach. “I was hit with a Blasting Hex, and I landed on a soft surface though, so I don't know if that hurt it...”

Pomfrey nodded, seeming to understand that Harry was not yet ready to openly discuss his pregnancy with Teddy in the room. Instead, she took out her wand, and pointed it at his abdomen, flicking it a few times as she muttered under her breath. After a moment, a tiny scroll appeared in midair, and Pomfrey snatched it up.

“Everything seems fine, in that...*regard*, Harry,” she confirmed, “and my diagnostic spell shows no other negative effects to you, both magically and physically.” She paused, and after a moment she added, “now...if you can find a way to untangle yourself from your mate and godson, may I speak to you for a moment...privately?”

“No,” Teddy protested, immediately climbing on Harry and hugging him tightly. “Uncle Harry promised to never ever leave again. You're asking him to stop promising.”

“Don't worry, Teddy,” Harry said with a reassuring smile as he offered the boy a gentle, reassuring squeeze. “I'm not leaving-leaving. I'll just be in the other room with the matron for a minute, I promise.”

“I don't want you to go,” Teddy whimpered, hugging him tighter as tears came to his eyes. “I want you to stay.”

“It's all right, Teddy,” Harry murmured, biting his lip as he thought. “Oh, I know! We'll leave the door open, all right? You can come with us and sit in the hall. You'll be able to see me the whole time, but you gotta *promise* to stay outside until I say it's okay to come in, all right? How does that sound?”

Teddy bit his lip, his little arms tightening around Harry's neck, before he nodded reluctantly.

“All right, come on then,” Harry said, pausing to squeeze Remus's hand and offer him a meaningful glance before he got to his feet with Teddy in his arms, and followed Pomfrey upstairs towards the guest room.

Harry set Teddy down just outside it, and smiled reassuringly as he ruffled the boy's hair.

“Now, Ted, me and Madam Pomfrey are gonna go inside, and we're gonna cast special Charms, so you'll be able to see us, but you won't hear us, all right? I'm not going anywhere.”

Teddy nodded, his eyes misty with tears, but it seemed as though he was trying to be a Big Boy, and not make a fuss.

His heart aching for him, Harry knelt down to give his godson one more hug before he got up and reluctantly headed into the room after the matron.

“Sorry for taking so long,” Harry said as he crossed into the room, speaking only after he felt the Silencing Charm go up.

“It's quite all right, Harry,” Pomfrey replied with a comforting smile. “After your ordeal...not just you have been affected by your imprisonment.”

“Yeah, I noticed,” Harry replied, casting his gaze back towards Teddy, who was sitting on the carpeted floor with his knees drawn to his chest, and he was watching the pair intently. “D'you think he's going to be all right?”

“It may take some time for him to feel reassured that you are not leaving again, but I do believe he will be fine, Harry,” Pomfrey said as she offered him another smile. “I did not bring you here to talk about your godson, however.”

“Right, sorry,” Harry replied, flushing a little. “Er...what did you want to discuss?”

“You, of course,” Pomfrey said, arching a brow as she regarded him. “We all know the sort of man Lucius Malfoy is, and you seem to be holding it together much better than I expected.”

“I'm not made of glass,” Harry retorted defensively, and crossed his arms across his chest.

“I never implied that, Harry,” Pomfrey said patiently as she regarded him, her expression unreadable. “Furthermore, I will not pry if you do not wish to discuss your ordeal, but if he touched you, sexually, it can have a lasting and deep impact on your mind. I say this only because I am concerned for you; I do not wish to speak on this out of some sort of morbid curiosity.”

“He never touched me,” Harry said, his voice strong and still deeply defensive, all but daring her to press the subject further. “He couldn't—my pheromones or whatever stopped him from getting close.”

“Be that as it may, what you endured would be traumatic for anyone,” Pomfrey said patiently, and though Harry wanted to be angry at her words, something in them did not make Harry feel as though she was trying to belittle him—she was simply stating facts. “You have always been an incredibly strong young man—magically, mentally, and even physically. No one would ever mistake Harry Potter for a weak person. However, what you went through will still have some...*lasting effects*. You may experience nightmares, perhaps anxiety over situations that might remind you of your ordeal. I feel that to combat this, it may be best to *talk* to someone, Harry. I will not force you, and it does not have to be me, or Remus, or any of your friends—there are Mind Healers you can speak with in order to minimize the lasting effects this has on your life going forward. It is not about weakness, and it never is. Even the strongest person can fall victim to their memories.”

"I'll...think about it," Harry muttered, crossing his arms. Why did Pomfrey think he needed to talk about what happened—to *anyone*? He felt *fine*.

"Good." Pomfrey smiled. "Now, the other thing I wished to discuss is your pregnancy, given that you seemed a bit hesitant to speak on it in front of everyone downstairs."

"Er, yeah," Harry replied, shifting from foot to foot. "Remus is still in denial, I think—he's afraid of pushing me towards a decision. And we haven't even told Teddy about our relationship yet, so..."

"There is no rush," Pomfrey interjected with another patient smile. "Teddy is too young to present as alpha or omega, and as a result he will not notice your change in scent; you will have a few months to decide what you wish to say to him before you begin to show."

"Er, right," Harry replied, and the matron nodded.

"Your child is fine, and you are just about two weeks along, according to what charms I used," Pomfrey continued. "However, you will need to be mindful of not pushing yourself too hard during the first trimester—that is, until your thirteenth week. Miscarriage can be quite high for male omegas, up to fifty percent in the first trimester, but it will drop dramatically once you pass that time frame. Until then, I would advise you keep from overtaxing yourself, which includes not using powerful spells where possible."

"Will I still be able to work?"

"Ah, yes, about that..." Pomfrey trailed off as she regarded Harry. "You are a trainee healer, correct?"

"Er, yeah," Harry replied. "I work in the Abernathy Ottis Ward usually, but sometimes I'm moved to the Spell Damage floor."

"Yes, well..." she paused, and Harry saw her throat contract, as though she was swallowing as she prepared herself to continue. "For the first trimester, you will smell...erm...*unappealing* to most alphas save for your mate, which would include your colleagues and patients. Added to that, unfortunately alphas tend to believe that their opinion is somehow *better* than that of a beta or omega. That being said, your superiors may feel that a pregnant omega on the ward may be counter-productive to healing, and it is very likely that they will either put you on leave or sack you."

"*What?*" Harry sputtered. "But...but...can they *do* that?"

"They have, many times," Pomfrey said grimly. "I am sorry to be so blunt, Potter, but St Mungo's tends to be a bureaucracy first, and a place for healing second. That is why many omegas in the healing field elect to work elsewhere."

"Wh-What am I supposed to do, then?" Harry sputtered. "Just...just...go on, hope for the best, pray that they don't sack me?"

“That's up to you, but I would expect that you will be on sick leave for a week or two first in order to recover from what occurred, then they will decide how to...shall we say, *deal with you* once you're on rotation again.”

“That's not exactly comforting, Miss,” Harry said sourly, and she smiled at him apologetically.

“What you do with your life is up to you, Harry, but if you like, I could always do with a second set of hands at Hogwarts. ”

“I...beg your pardon?”

“Well, I would not protest to having a trainee healer in the Hospital Wing, pregnant or not, and I see no reason why Professor McGonagall would protest it. I intend to retire in the next ten years, and I would need a competent successor. What do you think?”

“I...can I think on it?” Harry asked, and Madam Pomfrey offered him a warm smile.

“Take all the time you need, Harry.”

Fallout

Chapter Notes

A/N: Next update is scheduled for June 2nd. Enjoy! :)

Trigger Warning: Panic Attacks, Flashbacks, Dissociation, Abortion Ideation

Chapter Sixteen – Fallout

“Come,” Madam Pomfrey said, touching Harry's arm lightly, and drawing him out of his daze. “I think your godson has waited quite long enough, don't you?”

Harry smiled, nodding, though his mind was still caught upon her offer.

Work at Hogwarts?

It was like a dream come true.

Harry stepped back out into the hall with Pomfrey lagging behind in order to take down her spellwork, and Teddy immediately leapt to his feet, his eyes bright.

“All done?” he asked.

“All done.” Harry confirmed, and held out his arms to the youngster.

Teddy let out a delighted giggle as he jumped into Harry's embrace, his little legs locking around Harry's middle, and his arms around his neck.

“Done forever?” Teddy asked, and Harry blinked at him as Pomfrey moved to join him, and they began to head downstairs.

“What d'you mean, Ted?”

“Now that you're done with talking, you can just stay here forever and ever and play with me,” Teddy explained as he nestled his head on Harry's shoulder, and Harry chuckled.

“I don't plan on going anywhere, Ted, I promise,” Harry said as he rubbed the boy's back, making him smile.

“Good,” Teddy said, his little face dipping into the crook of Harry's neck, like a baby bird seeking comfort. “I missed you a whole lot, Uncle Harry.”

"I missed you too, Ted," Harry said, smiling a little as he hugged the boy close, and they made it the rest of the way downstairs.

~*~

Upon reaching the landing, Harry let out a small yelp of surprise when a familiar feathery tennis ball collided with the side of his head.

"Pig!" Harry cried, bewildered, and looked around to see Remus sitting upon the sofa, a barn owl on his knee, the creature clicking her beak irritably at her companion's antics.

"It would appear that your friends heard about your rescue," Remus said dryly, and the barn owl clicked her beak again, making Harry smile. Hermione's animals always had *interesting* personalities, to say the least, and her owl Aphrodite was certainly no exception—a very orderly creature, who never put a feather or talon out of line, and had very little patience for Pig.

"That would explain things," Harry muttered, smiling as he lifted one hand to rub at his temple while Pig continued to twitter excitedly, circling their heads as Harry carried Teddy over to his father, but like before Teddy was unwilling to let Harry go, and merely tightened his grip on his godfather when Harry tried to set him down.

"No," Teddy whined, and Harry chuckled warmly. Not quite willing to make Teddy let him go, he sat down with the boy in his lap, and Remus squeezed Harry's knee in quiet affection. He relieved both Pig and Aphrodite of their letters before they took flight out of the open sitting room window, and Remus used his wand to close the frame, while Harry pocketed the letters, vowing to read them later when Teddy wasn't actively clinging to him.

"Where'd Andromeda go?" Harry asked while Pomfrey helped herself to a pinch of Floo Powder off the mantle.

"Home," Remus replied, "she seemed to think we should be alone for the remainder of the day to catch up."

"Oh." Harry flushed, and Remus chortled warmly, shaking his head in amusement at the direction Harry's mind immediately leapt to.

"Harry," Pomfrey said, drawing Harry's attention away from his mate, and he glanced over to the Matron. "In the next three weeks, I would like to see you in order to see how your...*condition* is coming along, all right?"

"All right," Harry agreed, ignoring the way Remus tensed up next to him at the reference to his pregnancy; there would be time enough to discuss it later. "And I will let you know soon about my decision about your offer."

"Take your time, Harry," she said, "there is no rush to come to a decision."

Harry nodded, still smiling as he watched her toss the powder into the fire, and she disappeared in a whirl of green flame.

The moment that Pomfrey disappeared, Harry let out a small sigh, and rested his head on Remus's shoulder.

Remus's hand moved from Harry's knee to the back of his neck, squeezing gently, and Harry let out another sigh as he felt his body relax slowly.

"I hope that this isn't a dream," Harry murmured, "because if it is, I never want to wake up."

Teddy responded to Harry's earnest words by pinching his cheeks, hard enough that it made Harry yelp and jerk up, his hands coming up to cover his face while he frowned at the tot.

"Teddy," Harry said, doing his best to keep his voice even, "why did you do that? That hurt."

"Daddy said that if you is pinched and not wake up, it means you're not sleeping," Teddy explained, his eyes wide, as though he didn't understand why his godfather was cross with him. "See? You're not sleepy."

Harry pressed his lips together, and turned to Remus for help, only to find that the older man had turned away from them, and his shoulders were quaking with silent laughter.

"Thank you so much for your help," Harry said sarcastically, rubbing one of his cheeks as Remus continued to laugh, while Teddy looked on bemusedly, apparently at a loss for what his father found so funny.

~*~

For more than an hour after Teddy's painful 'help', Harry found himself caught in a haze of confusion, given that he had no idea what he was supposed to be doing now that he'd been liberated from Lucius's evil clutches.

Perhaps because he'd spent a fortnight in a state of survival, Harry felt *lost*.

Remus insisted that Harry eat from the platter of tea and sandwiches that had been prepared earlier, while Teddy stayed sat across Harry's knees, helpfully pushing sandwiches at Harry's face whenever he stopped eating, and when the tot had to go to the toilet, Teddy always asked for Harry to accompany him.

Harry exchanged a worried look with Remus as the day began to inch by. They'd opted to hold off on any serious discussions until after Teddy was occupied, so as to not worry him. However, Harry could see that Teddy seemed to be suffering from his own brand of trauma from Harry's capture—and though he recognized it, Harry didn't have a clue how to remedy it.

During Teddy's afternoon nap, Harry had been dragged along with him, and to his surprise, Teddy led him up to his and Remus's bedroom, and not his own.

Harry, once again, logged away this curiosity in order to ask Remus about it later, and lay down next to Teddy on the bed. He rubbed the boy's back and let him sleep nestled close to Harry, and even when he was certain that Teddy was utterly dead to the world, he didn't have the heart to get up—Teddy had had enough traumatic experiences at Harry's hands, and he didn't want to scare Teddy by causing him to wake up to an empty bed.

Harry wasn't there for very long before Remus came upstairs to join them, as though he too could not bear to be away from Harry for very long.

The alpha's arms wrapped around Harry's middle, shifting forward until Harry was gently sandwiched between his godson and his mate. Remus's hand stroked over Harry's flat stomach; his touch was hesitant, but it seemed to be interwoven with longing, as though he was ashamed of showing Harry affection in relation to his pregnancy.

“Tonight we'll talk,” Remus whispered in Harry's ear before he pressed a gentle kiss to the back of his neck. “I promise. I won't hold anything back.”

Harry smiled, and rested his hand over Remus's.

“Good.”

~*~

That night, after a simple homemade meal of shepherd's pie and treacle tart for pudding, Harry and Remus put Teddy to bed (again, in the master room) five times before he stayed down.

The victory of Teddy actually sleeping was aided in no small part by a cup of cocoa laced with child-friendly Sleeping Draught. Part of Harry felt a little guilty about using such a potion on Teddy, but by the same token, he knew that he and Remus needed to talk, and Teddy had become almost frighteningly needy in Harry's absence.

“God, poor Teddy,” Harry said with a small huff as he sat down on the sofa, while Remus conjured them a tea platter, complete with chocolate-covered digestives. “I had no idea his separation anxiety had gotten *this* bad. What *happened* while I was gone?”

“A lot happened,” Remus said darkly, exhaling a sigh similar to Harry's as he sat down next to him, and laid a hand on his knee. “But Teddy's separation anxiety started before you...er...*left*...and I think it was compounded by all that happened. Teddy started crawling into my bed every night after you were taken, and I just didn't have the heart to turn him away. He had nightmares almost every night, even with me next to him.”

“Tell me, please,” Harry said, shifting his body to face Remus, and he bowed his head.

“It was bad,” Remus said, his voice so soft that Harry had to strain his ears to hear him. “The moment you left, I contacted the Ministry. However, they refused to hear me out without making an appointment, set several months away.

“I contacted Kingsley next,” Remus continued, his eyes distant as he spoke. “But when he looked at everything, it all seemed very legal, at least on paper. He said that he would do what he could to look deeper, just to ensure that you weren't unjustly taken away, but given that Lucius was considered something of a model prisoner, so to speak, he said that politically there was only so much he could do.”

Remus scrubbed a hand across his face, a look of deep stress blooming upon his expression, and Harry reached out for one of his hands, squeezing it gently.

“I got myself a barrister, and when I explained the situation to her, she assured me that I had a case,” he said. “In addition to the questionable legal practices that Lucius used in order to take you away, she told me that she had had experiences with Lucius in the past, and she was familiar with his particular brand of weaselling his way out of sticky legal situations.

“I relayed all of this to your friends, of course—Ron and Hermione were sending me owls daily, sometimes twice a day, asking for updates on what was going on with you. After the barrister told me that it may take a few days to sort out everything, Hermione in particular was not at all satiated by my explanations, nor the idea that she would have to wait, and she dove so deeply into Wizard Law that she risked losing her position at St Mungo's, as she was doing little else but trying to help you.”

“That sounds like her,” Harry mused aloud, and Remus chuckled warmly.

“Indeed. Well, she and Ron came by several times each week, and Teddy always asked them where you were, which involved some rather inventive lying that left all of us feeling quite awful. It never feels good to lie about something so big to such a small child.

“And then...your Patronus arrived.”

Remus paused, and a warm smile came over his face. In the span of an instant he appeared to regress to a much younger man—his expression was warm and open, and it left Harry feeling an odd sense of pride knowing that it was something that he had done to bring such a look to his face.

“Yeah?” Harry murmured, not quite happy about drawing Remus from his daze, but keen to hear the details of all that had happened at the same time. “Then what happened?”

“I—” Remus paused, and hesitated, glancing at Harry from the corner of his eye. “I told my barrister what you said—the pertinent parts, that is, nothing that she would not need to know. The fact that you were pregnant, how you reached out to me, how often you asked of Teddy, everything that might strengthen our case.”

Harry inclined his head, nodding slightly. While he could not say that he was particularly *pleased* about Remus relaying such private information to a stranger, at the same time he understood that it was necessary, and did not protest.

“What happened next?” Harry prompted, his other hand falling to close over the other side of Remus's hand, and the older man smiled, the expression still warm, and Harry watched him visibly swallow before he continued.

“Most of the week after your first Patronus was spent in frustration,” Remus continued with a small sigh. “I was told—repeatedly—that there was nothing I could do, to leave it to my barrister, and if I intervened too much I could risk corrupting the case.

“But then, a few days into the week, my barrister sent me an owl which indicated to me that she wanted to arrange a meeting with someone who wanted to accrue some memory evidence from Lucius. Someone who Lucius would allow near you, and not feel as though they would steal you away.”

“Draco,” Harry filled in, and Remus smiled.

“Indeed,” Remus replied, chuckling a little. “In fact, I would almost describe demeanour as *bloodthirsty* when we had our meeting. He seemed quite keen to make his father pay for what he put Draco and his mother through. He was very eager to help, and though it was a risk—I felt that it was entirely possible that Draco wished to do this merely to hurt you, I trusted that if something bad happened, you would tell me.”

“Of course,” Harry said, and felt a sick sort of feeling pool in his stomach as he recalled all the *truly bad things* that had occurred that Harry hadn't told Remus about yet.

He doesn't need to know, Harry thought, swallowing thickly. It's over—it's done. There's no reason for him to know what that sick bastard did to me.

“Well, the rest you mostly know about,” Remus finished. “Draco went to the Manor, and after gathering all the evidence he needed that you were being abused, Draco left and alerted the authorities. There was an attempt by Lucius's comrades to bar the Magical Law Enforcement people from arresting Lucius, and that led to the discovery of several corrupted officials who had been bribed or threatened in order to participate in Lucius's ruse. Those who falsified documents or took a more active role in the deception were arrested, at which time many more came forward with proof of Lucius's threats, and you were rescued.”

“You did so much just for me,” Harry said, bowing his head a little. Remus caught Harry's chin, gently coaxing his gaze up until their eyes met.

“Harry, you are worth it,” Remus said reverently before he pulled Harry into a close embrace. Harry tucked his head into Remus's throat, scenting him, and concurrently hiding his tears from his alpha.

“I love you, Remus,” Harry said when he finally lifted his head again. “I really do.”

Remus leant in, pressing a gentle kiss to Harry's lips, and Harry felt his heart flutter from the tender touch. He shifted closer in order to deepen the kiss, and let out a whine when Remus pulled back sooner than Harry would have liked.

“Now,” Remus said, his voice a little hoarse, as though he, too, would much rather keep snogging than talk out their problems. “I think we have something *else* that we need to discuss.”

Remus brushed his hand across Harry's abdomen pointedly, and Harry bit his lip as newfound nervousness began to encroach on him.

“I want to know, Harry,” Remus began, his words slow and halting, “if you truly want to keep this child. No matter your answer, I promise that I will support you. You may take as much time as you need with making your decision; I am only worried that your initial insistence that you wanted it had more to do with a survival instinct rather than a genuine feeling.”

“Do *you* not want me to keep it?” Harry asked, immediately wincing when the words came out more accusatory than he'd intended. “I mean, I want to keep it, I do, but are you not ready for a second child? Is that it?”

“I—I can't make that decision for you, Harry—”

“—that's not what this is about,” Harry interrupted crossly, and pulled back from Remus to fold his arms across his chest as he regarded his mate. “I know that if I *really* didn't want to keep it, you would support me. That isn't even a *question*, Remus, I know you respect me and my autonomy, and if I was ever in doubt, I know that you would not protest to an abortion. However, that was not what I asked. Do *you* want this child?”

Remus hesitated, and looked into Harry's eyes. His expression was lost and fearful, as though he worried what Harry's reaction to his words might be.

In truth, Harry knew the answer to his question, but he needed to hear Remus say it, if nothing else to get past this point, and move forward.

Harry waited, and held his breath.

“Yes, I want this child,” Remus said at last, sounding distinctly guilty as he said it. “I know that my use of wolfsbane stops the foetus from inheriting my Lycanthropy—that's what happened with Dora. But...I just worry that you are keeping the child for my benefit, and not your own.”

“Oh, Remus,” Harry said softly as he unfolded his arms and reached out to touch the older man's cheek. “You are so selfless, and you always put me and Teddy before yourself, but you *don't* need to do that, love. We're both on the same page here, we *both* want this child, so you need to stop beating yourself up over it, all right? I'll admit, it came about much sooner than I expected, and the idea of being *pregnant* when I didn't even know blokes could do that a few months ago is just plain *weird*, but that doesn't mean I want it any less. I *want* to give Teddy a little brother or sister, and I want to do it with you at my side.”

“Oh, Harry...” Remus whispered, his hands moving to Harry's hips in order to slowly draw him closer until the omega was entangled in his alpha's arms. “How on earth did I get so lucky with you?”

“I just have *really* low standards,” Harry teased, and grinned when Remus began to laugh.

Remus leant in, and pressed a gentle kiss to Harry's lips, though unlike the previous one, there seemed to be a neediness to it that made Harry moan softly, and he immediately opened his mouth in silent invitation.

Remus's tongue darted out to entwine with Harry's, while his hands slid farther down to gently knead Harry's arse, and he felt himself flush when slick began to collect upon his entrance, like he was in heat.

“R-Remus—” Harry began, but Remus silenced him with another kiss.

“It's all right, you're not in heat, the child is fine,” Remus murmured between kisses. “It is a natural reaction to being with your mate, though I will stop if you're feeling uncomfortable.”

“Uncomfortable is the *last* thing I'm feeling right now,” Harry replied teasingly, and Remus rumbled deep in his throat, almost like a purr, as he moved in for another kiss.

“Hmm...then shall you...disrobe for me?”

In an instant, Harry felt the moment shatter as he was wrenched into the past.

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“Potter,” he purred silkily. “Despite your...shortcomings, I shall not allow you to inhibit me from getting what I paid for. If I cannot touch you, I shall watch you.”

“I—I beg your pardon?”

“Disrobe.”

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“Harry, *Harry!*” Lucius cried out, pulling Harry from the memory, though the blinding fear was still very present.

“*No!*” Harry cried, kicking out blindly, “no, please, Lucius, *stop!*”

“Harry, please, it's Remus,” the voice said. “You're home, you're safe—he can't hurt you anymore.”

The hands fell away, but still Harry could not catch his breath. He looked around so rapidly that he was making himself dizzy, and he could not help but mentally remark on how he'd

never been in this room of the Manor before. Why had Lucius made him come *here*?

No, that's not right, Harry thought, still breathing hard. *Remus came and got me out. I'm home...aren't I?*

Harry let out a confused sob, and Remus suddenly materialized in his line of sight, his arms open and welcoming, but not touching Harry, his brow creased and face pale with fear.

“Harry?” Remus asked gently. “Are you with me?”

“I—I don't know,” Harry replied, sniffing weakly as he tried to calm down. “Wh-What happened?”

“I believe the correct term is that I hit a trigger,” Remus said gently, still not touching Harry, which Harry could not decide was better, or worse. “You never told me that Lucius did anything to you.”

“I don't want to talk about it.”

“Harry—”

“No, Remus,” Harry interrupted sharply as he sat up and rubbed at his eyes roughly. “It's *over*. I don't want to even *think* about what he did to me. We have more important things to talk about—Lucius's trial, and—and how to tell Teddy that you and I are together. Something.”

Anything but that.

“Harry, I know that you do not want to discuss it, but we should,” Remus said, his voice gentle as he spoke, like Harry was some sort of spooked deer. “Lucius's trial and what to tell Teddy we will discuss in due course, but right now I am more concerned about what just occurred.”

Harry ground his teeth in anger; Remus had been so *good* to him up to this point—why was he mucking it up now?

“Why?” Harry asked sullenly. “It's *over*.”

“It is, but clearly part of your mind is still caught in a state of survival, and that will make it difficult to move forward and away from whatever happened,” Remus explained patiently. “You were quite adamant *before* about Teddy seeing a Mind Healer for his separation issues, why do you not offer yourself the same courtesy? Is it because you are afraid I will stop loving you if I find out what happened? I assure you, you could kill a dozen men and eat their corpses, and I would still love you.”

“That's disgusting, Remus,” Harry said with a weak laugh, and his mate smiled at him warmly.

“It makes it no less true,” Remus said. “I will not force you one way or the other, but I do think that if you are unwilling to talk to me, then consider what you wanted for Teddy—a

Mind Healer would help you release this darkness from your heart, and less stress is not only good for you, but for the baby as well.”

At the mention of the baby, Harry felt some of his defensiveness ebb away as he glanced down at his stomach.

He pressed a hand to his abdomen, his mind churning with fear, anguish, and uncertainty. He'd forgotten in his panic that he was no longer the only one affected by his moods—there was a little spark of a life in his belly that needed to be cared for, by caring for himself.

“I almost forgot about the baby,” Harry breathed before he glanced up at Remus, who smiled at him sadly. “God, how could I *do* that?”

“It's all right, Harry,” Remus said gently. “You are barely a fortnight along, after all, it will take some time for it to feel more real, and less of an abstract idea. It's *okay*.”

Harry didn't feel like it was okay, but by the same token, he was just so exhausted from his outburst that he no longer had the will to argue the point.

Instead, Harry shuffled forward until he'd nestled himself into Remus's arms, finding comfort in his scent, and shut his eyes.

“It's all right, Harry,” Remus murmured as he bowed forward to kiss his hair. “Whatever you need, I will take care of you. I promise.”

Sarah

Chapter Notes

A/N: Next update is scheduled for June 16th. Enjoy!

Chapter Seventeen – Sarah

Harry felt decidedly awkward about being back at St. Mungo's in a patient capacity, rather than a healing one.

Hermione had been flitting in and out of his field of vision, smiling at him reassuringly every time she saw him, but she was too busy to stop and chat, which he understood.

And *missed*.

Harry fidgeted uncomfortably at the realization of how much he *missed* working. Pomfrey's offer came to mind as he sat there and he fidgeted uncomfortably, wondering how soon he'd be able to take her up on the offer, if St Mungo's truly planned to sack him for being pregnant.

In response to Harry's fidgeting, Remus coiled an arm around him and pressed a kiss to his temple, immediately calming him.

Harry's eyes slid to from Remus to Teddy, but the tot did not seem to notice the exchange. This was a good thing, Harry supposed, given that ever since Harry had gotten home Remus had become more visibly affectionate, though Harry couldn't decide if Remus was simply happy that Harry was home, or if it was another *alpha thing* that he wasn't previously aware of. However, Harry was glad that Teddy hadn't seemed to notice—he wasn't entirely certain if he was ready for *that* particular conversation just yet.

The boy in question was seated on a play mat in the corner of the waiting room, and he appeared to be trying to read a storybook to his stuffed bear. However, as far as Harry knew, Teddy had not yet learnt to read—and the book was upside-down.

The sight warmed Harry in the pit of his stomach, and he leant against Remus, seeking comfort, and Remus's arm tensed around him in silent reassurance.

“Are we doing the right thing?” Harry asked softly, and Remus immediately pressed another kiss to his temple.

“Yes, Harry, we are. Teddy needs this.”

Harry could hear the unspoken, *and so do you*, in Remus's voice, but Harry was thankful that he hadn't voiced it. Over the past few weeks it had become abundantly clear that Teddy needed to see someone for his issues other than his father and godfather. His nightmares had only gotten worse the longer Harry was home; he threw *epic* temper-tantrums if Harry or Remus tried to even *suggest* that Teddy sleep in his own bed at night or during nap time, and Harry could not even move one toe out of Teddy's line of sight without the boy getting upset.

Harry knew that his godson needed this—given his chosen profession, Harry should have known it better than anyone.

And yet, Harry couldn't quite shake the feeling that he'd somehow *failed* Teddy by allowing it to get this bad.

Harry was unable to think on it for much longer when a woman in her fifties meandered into the waiting room, a smile on her face.

Harry recognized her as the child mind healer from her photograph, which Harry had seen when he and Remus had gone about selecting someone for Teddy.

However, she wasn't wearing the typical healer's robes that Harry had expected. Along with her close-cropped silver hair and glasses, which were threaded on a fine gold chain around her neck, she was wearing an airy blue-grey tie-dyed shirt and a pair of jeans, along with a long string of beads that fell almost to her waist. More beaded bracelets covered both of her wrists, and she smelled faintly of sage and verbenas.

“Mr Potter and Mr Lupin?” she asked, smiling as she approached them, and they both nodded as they stood up. Teddy noticed immediately, and he dropped the book before he scuttled over, his bear hugged tightly in his little arms.

“Er...is it our turn?” Harry asked, not quite certain what to say in this sort of situation, while Remus merely smiled at the woman, and held out his hand to her.

“Remus Lupin,” Remus said as he offered her a friendly smile. “It is a pleasure to finally meet you.”

“Sarah Pryce,” she replied, smiling in return as she accepted Remus's hand and shook it politely. “Likewise.”

“Er, I'm Harry,” Harry said, doing his best to sound as much like a proper adult as he could. He held out his hand to her like Remus had, and she smiled as she accepted the gesture, shaking it firmly.

“I'm Teddy!” Teddy said, perhaps a little too loudly, as though he was afraid that the adults would forget about him. At the same time, he lifted his toy bear to balance it on his head. “And this is Mister Poof.”

“Why, hello Mister Poof!” Pryce said, smiling as she shook the bear's paw, making Teddy giggle. “Teddy, would you like to come into my office with your parents? I have all sorts of toys that you can play with in there—much more than in the waiting room.”

Teddy glanced to Remus, then his eyes slid to Harry, and both of them nodded encouragingly, staying close to Teddy in case he changed his mind.

“Okay,” the boy said at last, and Pryce smiled at him warmly.

“Wonderful,” Pryce said approvingly, and motioned towards her closed office door, which seemed to open without Pryce using her wand. “Shall we?”

Eagerly, Teddy took the lead, and the adults followed in his wake.

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Inside the office, Harry felt that it looked far less like a traditional office, and more like a child's play room. There were colouring books stacked on a shelf, mats laid on the floor with streets and forests printed on them, and overlaid with wooden train tracks. Little toy brooms, cars, dolls, stuffed animals of every kind were piled away neatly in wooden crates along the walls, and in lieu of proper seats, cushions and pouffes were scattered across the floor, reminding Harry rather suddenly of Trelawney's old tower classroom.

“Have a seat anywhere you would like,” Pryce said warmly while Teddy looked around curiously. “Would anyone like anything to drink?”

“Juice, please!” Teddy piped up immediately, his easy trust of the woman making Harry immediately feel more at ease. “I like apple.”

“Anything for you two?” Pryce asked kindly while she pulled out her wand.

“A cup of tea would be lovely, thank you,” Remus replied as he folded himself down somewhat awkwardly onto one of the cushions, and Harry mirrored him.

“Just water, thanks,” Harry added, and Pryce nodded, waving her wand once, and the requested drinks appeared, along with a large bottle of water filled with lemon and lime wedges for herself.

Once everyone had settled in, Pryce got down on her knees, more or less in the centre of the room, which lowered her down to Teddy's level. Teddy was still holding his bear on his head with one hand, and using the other to sip his juice while he looked around at everything, though his eyes always seemed to come back to Harry, as though he wanted to make sure that his godfather was still there.

“Do you like my office, Teddy?” Pryce asked kindly, and Teddy nodded his head, the spout of the sippy cup still in his mouth, though he did remember at the last moment to remove it before he responded.

“It's much betterer than Daddy's office,” he said, “he just has books and paper and things. When I grow up, I'll have an office like *this*.”

“What does your Daddy do?” she asked, her hands placed on her knees as she watched the boy, while Harry's mouth twisted in confusion, though he didn't interrupt. How was this *therapy*?

“He writes books about magical creepers,” Teddy said proudly. “They're *really* big books! And they bought a *whole bunch* for Hogwarts! Daddy said I'll get to read his book when I get in Hogwarts, but I don't really want to. He makes dragons sound boring.”

“Why are they boring?” Pryce asked, though there was a lilt of amusement in her voice. “I thought magical creatures were lovely.”

“Because he uses big words that I can't say, like...like...draco...mo...something. It's a big word. He uses them a lot when he writes stuff.”

“Ah, I see,” Pryce said with a warm chortle, while Teddy sipped his juice again, and began to toddle a little closer to the woman. “And what does your Uncle Harry do?”

“He heals people,” Teddy said, once again with pride in his voice. “He makes hurt people not hurt anymore, it's *real* important. Once I fell on my behind 'cause I was running so fast in the snow and it *hurt*. Harry said I hurt my...my...my cock, and—”

“—*coccyx*,” Harry interrupted, his face going rather red, while at the same moment Remus laid a hand on Harry's knee, as though to silence him.

“Thank you, Mr Potter,” Pryce said, a cold edge to her voice, as though she did not approve of the interruption. She turned back to Teddy, once again bearing a soft, welcoming smile. “Please go on, Teddy.”

Harry felt himself flush in response to the admonishment, while Teddy continued on with the story of how he slipped and fell in the snow. Harry kept quiet and listened, not daring to interrupt again.

He shifted his gaze to Remus, who was watching his son intently, and appeared entirely content with the proceedings. Harry on the other hand felt rather confused. It didn't seem at all like this would help Teddy in the long run—it seemed as though he was just chatting with the woman, and not even about anything of real importance.

“Would you like to play with some toys, Teddy?” Pryce asked, drawing Harry out of his daze just in time to see Teddy nod excitedly.

“Can I play with the trains?” he asked immediately, and Pryce smiled again, lifting her wand in order to summon a narrow box filled with train cars, and she offered it to the boy.

“Pick any you like,” she said. “They click together at the ends, and you can make them as long or as short as you want.”

Teddy began to excitedly pull out train cars, starting with what looked like a train car full of coal, and placed it in front of a green engine, followed by a caboose, and a red engine.

Harry watched with mild amusement as Teddy assembled his jumbled train, but the mind healer said nothing about it; she merely sat back and watched contentedly as Teddy constructed his masterpiece.

“Do you have any friends, Teddy?”

“Yes, Miss,” Teddy said distractedly, his full attention on the train.

“You needn't call me Miss if you don't want to,” she offered, “you can call me Sarah.”

“Oh.” He paused, and looked back up. “How come? Daddy says it's not polite to call grown-ups by their names.”

“Well, Teddy, some grown-ups do wish to be called Miss or Mister, but with me, I do not mind if you call me Sarah,” Pryce explained patiently. “However, if calling me Miss or Miss Pryce makes you feel better, you can call me that instead.”

“I like Sarah,” Teddy offered with a smile. “It's pretty.”

“Thank you, Teddy,” she said warmly. “Would you like to tell me about your friends?”

“I have Mister Poof,” Teddy started, pausing in his train-building to lift up the bear again as evidence.

“Are your friends all your toys?” Pryce asked gently, and Teddy shook his head. “No? Who would you say is your *best* friend?”

“You mean after Mister Poof?” Teddy asked, and Pryce nodded. “I guess...Prob'ly my Uncle Harry. He plays better than Daddy does.”

Harry smiled at this, as did Remus, but Pryce did not appear particularly cheered by Teddy's words. She glanced over to the two adults, her gaze calculating, but she said nothing as she looked back to Teddy, who continued to chatter on about the last game he'd played with his uncle the day before.

From there, little more of substance was said at that initial meeting. Teddy seemed to like her, and Harry knew that another female presence in his life was probably a really good thing, though Harry couldn't help but feel mildly apprehensive at the few glances Pryce had cast their way during Teddy's play. It wasn't quite disapproval, but there was *something* in her expression that put Harry on edge.

“Well, Teddy,” Pryce said, about an hour into their session, “I really want to keep playing with you, but there is a *very secret* place I would like to show you first. Is that all right with you?”

“Secret?” Teddy asked, his head jolting up with obvious intrigue, “what kind of secret?”

“A special place, just for kids,” Pryce replied with a warm smile. “You parents can come along, if you like.”

“Okay!”

The group got up, Harry and Remus with a few groans of protest from their stiff knees (Remus, more than Harry) while Pryce guided them from the room, with Teddy and Mister Poof in the lead.

“Any idea where we're going?” Harry whispered, keeping his voice down so Teddy could continue to talk with his new friend, and Remus shrugged his shoulders.

“No idea,” he replied, “I know that at the end of a session it is customary for the mind healer to go over the session and give the parents homework, so to speak, but where she's taking us...”

He trailed off, and shrugged.

The *super secret place* turned out to be a place that Harry actually knew—the St Mungo's Daycare.

The daycare was something that had been implemented before Harry had started working at the hospital, but after the war. With so many people lost during that horrible time, healers who had children were struggling to find someone to mind them, and daycares within the wizarding world were just not as common as they were in the muggle world, though no one could articulate a clear reason why.

It had been big news for about a week when the Ministry implemented an on-premises daycare for its staff, and St Mungo's quickly followed suit. There was talk of a primary school or daycare being implemented in Diagon Alley, and even in Hogwarts as well, but that had not happened yet.

The knowledge of this acceptance of single parents utterly confused Harry—how was it that St Mungo's could readily accept the children so easily, but not a pregnant male omega like *him*?

Of course, at the present moment, all Harry had to go on was Pomfrey's word, and not that of his superiors, but he didn't think the matron would lie about something like this.

Harry shook his head in order to dispel the thoughts, just as they made it inside the space.

The daycare was cluttered with little child-sized tables and various play areas that contained a larger volume of the toys that Pryce had had in her office. There were about fifteen children in the space, ranging in age from babies all the way to ten-year-olds, though the staff seemed to be doing a fair job of keeping the children in groups of similar age ranges, which Harry thought was rather a good idea.

Teddy seemed a little overstimulated by all the noise, and could only stare blankly at the space, which left Harry feeling more than a little queasy with guilt.

“Why don't you go and play, Teddy?” Pryce offered gently. “You needn't go far, and we will be here the whole time. I need to talk to your parents privately, but they can come and play with you after, if you wish to stay longer.”

“Do I have to?” Teddy asked hesitantly, and Harry felt his heart clench when Teddy's little hand visibly tensed in Pryce's. Impulsively, he wanted to snatch the child away from the mind healer, like she was somehow making things worse, even when he knew that logically that wasn't true.

“You don't have to do anything that you don't want to do,” she replied at once, and gave him another reassuring smile. “Would you rather sit and colour while you wait for us to finish up?”

Shyly, Teddy nodded, and regarded the other children nervously. Harry didn't really understand the boy's attitude, as he was usually so open and exuberant. Instead of protesting Harry said nothing, and he watched helplessly as Pryce led Teddy over to a free table, and set him up with a box of crayons and a colouring book before she made her way back over to Harry and Remus, still smiling pleasantly.

“Well, shall we sit down?” she asked. “We've got a *lot* to unpack here, and I have a feeling that Teddy will not be kept occupied forever.”

“That is true,” Remus agreed with a warm chuckle. “He has *quite* the reserve of energy.”

Using some of the few adult-sized chairs in the room, the trio sat down within a few feet of Teddy, which seemed to relax him a little. Pryce set up a few privacy charms—just enough to stop them from being overheard, though Teddy did not react to this one way or the other, and kept on colouring. Most of the other kids ignored Teddy, too busy with their own play, though a few did eye Teddy curiously, as though they wanted to go over to him, but hadn't truly decided whether they wanted to or not.

“All right,” Pryce said as she sat down. “Well, I would say that that was a very good first session. Teddy is a bright boy, very trusting, considering what he has been through, and it is clear to me that you two love him very much.”

“We do,” Remus confirmed. “We were talking of having Harry adopt him as a second parent, but...everything happened before we were able to follow through with it.”

“That is a good idea,” Pryce said with an approving nod. “Legally, Harry has not as many rights as you do, being simply *The Godfather*. If something were to happen, it would stop the Ministry taking Teddy away to put him with another family member, or in an orphanage.”

“We'll do it soon,” Harry promised. “It's just...er...well, complicated, I guess. A lot's going on, and I suppose we're sort of not sure what order to do it all in.”

“In my notes you said you're pregnant, correct? And Teddy isn't aware?” Pryce asked, and Harry nodded. “How far along are you?”

“Five weeks, not enough to show yet,” Harry supplied, and compulsively covered his stomach with one hand. Remus immediately wound an arm around Harry protectively, and he leant against his alpha with a small sigh of contentment.

“Well, start there,” Pryce advised. “I know from our letters prior to meeting Teddy that you two do a fair job of keeping him on a schedule, breakfast and bedtime at the same time every day, lots of activities, all that, but too many surprises in short order may stress Teddy out, so the more spread-out they are, the easier it will be for Teddy to take it all in. Generally, children can be quite resilient, but I do not wish to put added stress on him, in particular until he has regained some of his independence.”

“That's fair,” Harry agreed, though internally he felt his stomach twist with unease—he hoped that Teddy would be okay with having a sibling.

“Now, as for the session itself,” Pryce said, barrelling forward as though she wanted to cram in as much as possible before Teddy got bored. “My main concern at the moment is his limited contact with children his own age, and his separation anxiety. I want you to start taking him to places that have other children he can play with. It doesn't matter where—a park, a zoo, here in the daycare—but he needs to be socializing with children his own age. Understand?”

Both of them nodded obediently. Harry felt that the command was fair, though yet again he felt a twinge of anger in his stomach, like she was questioning his ability to care for Teddy properly.

Wait, what am I thinking? Harry thought incredulously. She's telling you to take Teddy to the bloody park, it's not like she's accusing you of hurting him.

“And what about the separation anxiety?” Remus asked mildly while he placed a hand on Harry's knee, as though he could sense Harry's stress.

“That will take more time to remedy, and unfortunately I wasn't able to get to it today,” Pryce said while she regarded them. “However, I did notice that Teddy talks of you, Harry, rather a lot. This is good, but it is also quite clear to me that he is afraid of losing you, or forgetting you—sometimes children with these sorts of issues will repeatedly talk about a lost parent, or in this case, a parent he fears losing, and almost nothing else, as though to remind themselves that they haven't been abandoned. It is clear to me that Teddy is fearful of losing you again, and now it is your job to reassure him that you're not going anywhere, not permanently, and if you do need to go somewhere, you will always come back.”

“And how do we do that?” Harry asked, and grimaced at how he sounded. He hated how defensive he was feeling, and it was taking all of his energy to maintain his polite, mature tone of voice.

Harry ground his teeth in frustration; if Remus could approach all this logically, why couldn't *he*?

“Start small,” Pryce advised. “Step out of the room for a few moments, then come back. If Teddy fusses you can give him something—a toy, a handkerchief, whatever you like, and imply to him that it is a *very important item* that you will absolutely come back for. You can use something real that has true value to you, or create a story around something else so that Teddy will understand that the item is something you will absolutely return to collect from him. It is a crutch, but it will help Teddy to walk, so to speak. Eventually, I would like you to progress to a point where you can leave to go down to the shop, or spend a quiet evening together, or go out with your friends without it upsetting Teddy. It will take time, however—weeks, or even months.”

“I think we can do that,” Remus replied, smiling softly at Harry. “Maybe we can begin with Harry being able to shower without Teddy sitting in the room before we tackle him doing the shopping.”

Pryce laughed warmly, and Harry felt himself relax, if only slightly. He still felt tense, guarded, but Pryce's warm attitude was calming him down, making it clear to Harry that if she sensed his emotions, she wasn't holding it against him.

“The last thing I wish to touch on is Teddy's sleep habits,” Pryce continued, consulting her notes again. “He is sleeping in your bed with you, correct?”

“It started when Harry was...taken,” Remus answered awkwardly, suddenly not quite able to look at Pryce in the eye as he spoke. “He was quite distraught, as you can imagine, and he was terrified of Harry leaving us.”

“When it actually happened, his whole world fell apart,” Remus continued, his voice breaking a little as he spoke, and Harry reached for one of his hands, which his alpha gripped like a lifeline. “I let him stay in my bed because of how bad his nightmares got, though he never would tell me what they were about. Before Harry came, he had nightmares too, but not with such frequency. After Harry came back...he just couldn't sleep alone. He'd scream and cry and throw a fit if we tried to have him sleep in his own bed.”

“Tonight, you're going to put him to bed in his *own* bed,” Pryce said, her voice firm. Harry opened his mouth to protest, and she held up her hand to silence him. “He will be upset, he will probably cry, or scream, possibly even throw things in order to have his way. Remember, you two: *you* are the parents, and you are responsible for his well-being, both physically and emotionally. This sort of codependency can get harder to break the longer it goes on, so the sooner you start, the better.”

“Once you get him into bed, one of you will stay with him until he falls asleep. Don't engage him in play; make sure you do something relaxing with him. Read to him, or sing to him, rub his back, and speak in soft, calming tones. Once he is asleep, you can leave. If he gets up at any point in the night, take him back to his bed, and repeat the process. In time, it will get easier, but the first few nights will probably make you hate me for suggesting it.”

Remus chuckled, the sound warm and full, while Harry managed a weak smile. He couldn't quite imagine that particular part of her suggestions working at all, but Remus seemed fine with it, and Harry didn't want to cause a fuss by protesting.

Harry glanced down at his knees, chewing his bottom lip as he listened to Pryce and Remus chat. He didn't understand himself at the moment, and he certainly didn't understand why he was so determined to quash his protests before they ever slipped past his lips. As a teenager he'd had *no problem* standing up to teachers—so why was he so paradoxically enraged and intimidated by this kindly woman in the same breath?

Harry heaved a sigh, and glanced back up to Remus. He caught Harry's eye, and smiling, Remus wrapped an arm around Harry's waist once more in silent reassurance.

~*~

The moment they got home, Harry made a beeline for the sofa, and all but fell upon it with an audible groan.

Mere seconds later, Harry heard the soft but distinct pitter-patter of Teddy following him. When Harry lifted his head, he smiled when he saw the little boy clambering onto the sofa next to him.

“Uncle Harry, what are you doing?” Teddy asked curiously. “You made a big sound when you fell.”

“Yeah, I did,” Harry agreed, rolling onto his side in order to draw Teddy into a hug, and the boy immediately snuggled into his arms, his little head dipping into the crook of Harry's neck, like he was drawing some sort of comfort from Harry's scent. In the back of his mind, he knew it was an *omega thing*, but he was too tired to question it with any sort of depth at present. “Did I worry you, Ted? I'm just tired, that's all.”

“I'm not worried, Uncle Harry,” Teddy said cheerfully. “I'm not tired, even though I played with Sarah a lot.”

“We're going back to see her in a fortnight,” Harry offered, smiling a little. “How do you feel about that?”

“I want to play with the trains again,” Teddy said happily, while his father finally finished divesting himself of his boots and cloak, and headed over to Harry and his son.

“Yeah?” Harry asked, sitting up a little more as Remus approached them, but before Harry could speak, Remus had caught Harry's chin in a gentle hold, and he pressed a tender but firm kiss to his lips.

“I have this sudden desire to bake,” Remus whispered against his mouth. “Would my omega like anything special?”

“Daddy, you *kissed* Uncle Harry!”

The youngster's outburst seemed to jar Remus out of his stupor, and he grimaced, as though he'd only just remembered that his son was present, and was mentally kicking himself over the kiss.

"Er, yeah, he did, Teddy," Harry said when it appeared as though Remus had momentarily lost his ability to speak. "How do you feel about that?"

"I don't know," Teddy replied, blinking owlishly at the two adults, while his eyes shifted to his father. "Does that mean that Uncle Harry is your wife, Daddy? Gran told me that alphas have wives."

Harry let out a disgruntled sputter, and Remus smiled, circling the sofa at last in order to sit next to Harry and his son. To Harry, it seemed as though the older man was just barely keeping his laughter in check at Teddy's question.

"Sometimes alphas do have wives, Teddy, but no, I think your Uncle Harry is my husband," Remus replied, not even a hint of shame in his tone as he spoke. "You see that white mark on his neck? That means we're married."

"How come you didn't have a big party?" Teddy asked, cocking his head to the side.

"I dunno, Ted," Harry filled in, smiling at Remus before he shifted his gaze back to his godson. "I guess 'cause neither of us wanted one."

"I like parties," Teddy said. "You should've had one."

"Maybe next time, Teddy," Remus replied, chortling fondly.

"Does that mean that Uncle Harry is my Mummy now?" Teddy asked curiously, "is Mummy not Mummy anymore?"

"I'm still your Uncle Harry," Harry said quickly, hoping to dissipate the heartbroken look that suddenly began to cross Remus's face. Most curiously (and perhaps thankfully), Harry felt no jealousy towards the memory of Tonks in that moment, his entire focus on clearing up Teddy's misunderstanding. "No one will ever replace your Mummy, Ted, just like your Daddy will always be your Daddy."

"Oh," Teddy replied, his brow scrunching a little in thought as he sat across Harry's knees. "Will you have babies? Gran says that married people have babies."

"Well, about that..." Harry began, biting his lip nervously as he cast a glance over to Remus, who seemed to know what he wanted to say, and nodded encouragingly. "While we're on the subject...er...Teddy, how would you feel about having a baby brother or baby sister?"

"I don't know," Teddy replied, but smiled a little as he gazed up at the adults. "I think it would be fun. I could teach them how to play right, and show them all my toys, and show them how to make their hair *purple!*"

As though to prove his point, Teddy scrunched up his face, and with a soft *pop!* his hair changed from a soft sandy blond like his father's to a violently bright purple, which made

both of them laugh, though Harry's heart ached a little in knowing that the baby wouldn't be a Metamorphmagus like their older brother.

“Teddy, the reason we're asking is because your uncle is growing a baby for us in his tummy, like your Mum grew you in her tummy, and the baby will be your half-sister or half-brother,” Remus explained patiently, and Teddy's eyes widened.

“*Really?*” Teddy asked, gasping a little, before he suddenly yanked up Harry's shirt, as though he expected to find an infant hiding in the clothing. “Uncle Harry, I don't see a baby!”

“Teddy, stop that!” Harry said with a warm, affectionate laugh, while Remus gently pried the fabric from the tot's hands, and helped Harry to smooth the garment out. “It's in there, Madam Pomfrey made sure. But it will take some time to grow, and in a little while you'll start seeing my stomach getting bigger, until the baby has to come out.”

“How many days until I can meet the baby?” Teddy asked excitedly, “can I meet them tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow is a little soon,” Remus replied, chuckling with a similar warmth to Harry as he reached out to touch his son's cheek affectionately. “Harry is about five weeks along right now, and the baby will want to come out in about eight months.”

“That's a *long* time, Daddy,” Teddy replied with a small huff. “Are you *sure* it has to be that long?”

“We're sure, Ted,” Harry said, reaching out to offer the boy a hug. “Now, come on, I think that's enough serious talk, and your dad *did* say something about baking...”

Teddy's eyes lit up, and in the span of an instant Teddy seemed to forget all about the baby.

“Daddy, I want to make chocolate biscuits!”

“Chocolate biscuits it is,” Remus replied fondly as he held out his arms, and Teddy immediately jumped into them. “Come on then, I need an *expert* to help me in the kitchen—and your uncle can supervise.”

Teddy let out a cheer as his father stood up with the boy still in his arms, and began to carry him to the kitchen. Harry got up and followed them, unable to wipe the wide smile off his face as he went.

Admit

Chapter Notes

A/N: Next update is scheduled for Tuesday, July 2nd. Updates are being moved to Mondays, but July 1st is a holiday here in Canada (Canada Day!), so my schedule for that week will be a little topsy-turvy.

Possible Content Warning: References to Past Trauma, Discussion of Triggers

Chapter Eighteen – Admit

The day felt too short for Harry, even with the added chaos of biscuit-making, which left the kitchen covered with flour and bits of chocolate, and took far too long to clean up.

Harry never wanted the day to end, in particular with what would happen upon its arrival—
Bedtime.

“Maybe tomorrow we should take him to the park or something,” Harry suggested timidly as they sat and watched Teddy play with his toys that evening. At the moment, Teddy was constructing a tall block castle for one of his bears, and was humming contentedly as he worked. The radio was on, a low thrum of smooth jazz filling the pockets of quiet, and wet snow, almost sleet, was falling outside.

“Yeah,” Remus agreed, tugging Harry a little closer as they watched Teddy play, offering his omega one of the biscuits they'd made, and Harry smiled in thanks before he bit into it. “Perhaps we can contact Bill. Victoire isn't much younger than Teddy...”

“I don't wanna play with Victoire,” Teddy complained, clearly having heard them. “I wanna play with the baby!”

“Ted, we told you,” Harry reminded him with as much warmth and as little exasperation in his voice as he could manage. “The baby won't come for another eight months. You can't play with them yet.”

“Are you *sure* it's coming, Uncle Harry?” Teddy asked, getting up from his play and hugging his bear close as he regarded his godfather with a critical eye. “You look the same.”

“C'mere, Ted,” Harry said, opening his arms to the boy, and he eagerly scampered forward before he happily clambered into Harry's embrace.

Once Harry had Teddy settled, he pressed his hand to the back of the tot's head and coaxed him down until his face was pressed into the crook of Harry's neck.

“Okay,” Harry said into Teddy's hair, “now, take a big sniff. What d'you smell?”

“I don't know,” Teddy said in the same endearingly innocent voice as always. “You.”

“Yeah?” Harry asked, “Anything else?”

“Just you.”

“Do I smell different than normal?”

“A little, I guess,” Teddy admitted with a small shrug as he pulled back and gazed up at Harry. “You smell sweet. Like honey.”

“That's the baby in there, making my scent different,” Harry said, smiling encouragingly at Teddy, while he pointedly ignored his mate's look of utter shock, as though he didn't realize that Teddy would be able to smell the difference.

“Oh,” Teddy said as he settled across Harry's lap again. “Is that why Daddy sniffs you so much? 'Cause you smell good?”

“I—what—Teddy, I—I *never*—” Remus sputtered, while Harry began to howl with laughter.

“Oh, Daddy is *so* busted!” Harry said between raucous bouts of mirth, which made Remus turn bright red.

“Harry's pregnancy merely makes him smell nice,” Remus explained stiffly once Harry had calmed down. “Nothing more than that.”

“Okay, Daddy,” Teddy said cheerfully.

“*Mmmmm*,” Harry intoned, with a disbelieving note to his voice that made Remus's flush worsen, and Teddy began to giggle.

~*~

Harry sat alone in the sitting room, fiddling with a cup of tea, but not really drinking it. He could hear Remus giving Teddy a bath, which was not unlike sitting in the Splash Zone at a Marine Park. Often, Remus came out of these baths wetter than Teddy was, though never did he look displeased about it.

Harry had no issue with letting Remus have these moments with Teddy—he *wanted* Remus to have something special with his son, some sort of nightly ritual, and the baths had quickly become that. Even with Teddy's separation anxiety, Harry was keen for Teddy to have alone-time with his father, and they managed to talk Teddy into it by setting up a charm that allowed Teddy to see into the sitting room, like a television, so that he could be reassured that Harry had not gone anywhere.

In particular with what they were about to do, Harry was all too happy to let Remus take the lead on preparing Teddy for bedtime. To Harry, Remus seemed to be the more adept parent, and much more qualified to deal with the impending meltdown than Harry would be.

And *meltdown* didn't seem too far off the mark either, when Harry suddenly heard Teddy begin to *scream* .

At first, it was unintelligible shrieking. Had Harry not known better, Harry may have thought that Teddy was being murdered. It made his insides squirm unpleasantly, and he felt almost *sick* with guilt when Teddy began to form words.

“No, Daddy, nooooo!”

Harry took a shaking breath, and stared down into his teacup; only then did he realize that his hands were trembling. Part of him wanted to race in there and *tear* Teddy from his father's arms, despite how the more rational parts of his mind knew that this was for the best. It was horrible, but it *had* to be done. This would help Teddy, regardless how little it seemed like it at present.

Harry placed the teacup back on the table when he began to feel dizzy. Teddy was still screaming and crying. Harry felt positively sick. How in the world could this possibly *help* ?

Harry breathed in through his nose and out through his mouth. He felt dizzy and nauseous. He closed his eyes, but the dizziness did not abate, in particular when Teddy was still screaming bloody murder.

Harry counted the minutes, but kept losing his place from Teddy's screaming. Instead, Harry consulted his watch.

Fifteen minutes.

Twenty.

Twenty-five.

At the forty-five minute mark, Teddy's crying died down to a soft snuffling, indicating that he was still crying, but not pitching a fit any longer. He could hear Remus speaking softly to him, his voice low and even, the words, *it's all right, it's all right, sweetheart* , bleeding through the sounds of anguish.

Another forty-five minutes passed before Remus finally returned to the sitting room, his entire body slumped forward as though it was a real trial for him to remain standing. Harry quickly got up, wrapped an arm around his alpha, and guided him back to the sofa.

Remus fell onto the piece of furniture with a soft grunt, and nodded his thanks when Harry pressed a cup of tea on him.

“That sounded like fun,” Harry offered, and Remus laughed weakly.

“About as much fun as...” he trailed off, and shook his head. “I can't think of anything. That was horrid.”

“I'd offer to do the next one, but I'm not sure if I can,” Harry admitted, wincing as he glanced at his mate, who raised an eyebrow at him in question.

“Why not?” Remus asked when Harry said no more, and Harry squirmed uncomfortably in his seat. He didn't like how much he sounded like he was trying to shirk out of his side of parenting responsibilities, and he wasn't wholly certain if his explanation would diminish that feeling.

“When you were in there with Ted, and he was crying...” Harry trailed off for a moment, and swallowed thickly, trying to think of how to best explain it, while a hand compulsively brushed across his abdomen. “I...well...I felt... *weird* .”

“Weird?”

“I got...dizzy. Really woozy, and I felt like I might puke. I had to close my eyes, but it didn't help, and...and...”

Harry groaned, and bowed forward slightly in order to bury his face in his hands. Remus's palm pressed reassuringly to Harry's back, as the omega forced out a small laugh. “I'm sorry, I must sound *completely* mental.”

“You don't sound mental, love,” Remus replied as he shifted closer to Harry until the outer edges of their legs were touching. Remus's arm moved to wrap around Harry's waist, and he pressed a kiss to his hair. “It sounds like omega nesting behaviour to me.”

“Nesting?” Harry asked, peering up from his hands. “Why does that sound familiar?”

“It's a natural omega behaviour,” Remus explained patiently while Harry straightened up, and leant into his embrace. Remus smiled, and tightened his hold on him. “It tends to occur around an omega's heat or when they are pregnant, and physically it displays itself in behaviours such as over-protectiveness or dominance around other omegas—that is to say, you getting irrationally jealous if I happen to be near an omega who is not you, and building a nest in our bed of soft materials, pillows, clothing...whatever you can get your hands on. Emotionally it can come out of you like it did earlier...a sort of panic over a distressed child, in particular when you see that child as your own.”

“But I wasn't really...panicking,” Harry insisted. “I was just dizzy and stuff.”

“Sometimes anxiety displays itself in other way other than just blind fear,” Remus replied. “If one is particularly overwhelmed, it can come out as dizziness, or fainting.”

“Oh.” Harry paused, and chewed on his bottom lip. “So all that barmy attitude was 'cause I'm up the duff?”

“Pretty much, yes,” Remus replied as he chuckled warmly at Harry's choice of words.

Harry laughed, curling up so close to Remus that he was almost in his lap. Remus let out another warm laugh before he set his tea aside in favour of dragging Harry the rest of the way into his lap, and he pulled the omega into a kiss.

Harry responded in kind. He let out something akin to a purr, in particular when one of Remus's hands found the hem of his jumper, and snaked under the fabric in order to splay the digits across his abdomen.

Harry trembled, inhaling sharply at the touch, and Remus immediately froze.

“Harry?” Remus murmured, his voice making Harry reluctantly open his eyes, “are you with me?”

“I—yes, why?” Harry asked, blinking in confusion, and Remus smiled at him sadly. Harry felt mildly taken aback by the pity he saw on the older man's face, and he couldn't decide whether to be cross with him or not, in particular when he had no idea *why* Remus was looking at him like that. “Remus? Why did you ask me that?”

“Harry, the last time we attempted to be intimate, I momentarily lost you,” Remus explained while he brought up a hand to touch Harry's cheek gently. “I don't want to hurt you, Harry, even by mistake. I won't ask you to tell me what happened, but I do want you to try and tell me what might remind you of...things...in order to avoid inadvertently upsetting you.”

“I can't tell you what happened,” Harry replied quickly, and he grimaced at the soft, almost fearful tone with which he spoke.

“Why not, love?”

“B-Because I don't want you to hate me,” Harry replied, grimacing at the quavering tone of his voice, and he buried his face in his hands before Remus would be able to see his tears. He felt sickened with himself; how could he cry in front of Remus like this? He'd never been overly weepy before, and he *hated* that it was *Lucius* who was the cause of his hurt.

“Love, I could *never* hate you,” Remus said softly, one hand gently coiling around Harry's wrist, but he did not pull Harry's hands away. The limb rested there, gentle, and only when Harry felt marginally calmer did he allow Remus to coax his hands away from his face, and gently dry his tears.

“How can you not hate me?” Harry asked croakily, and Remus smiled at him softly as he leant in to press a kiss to each of Harry's damp cheeks, making him laugh weakly.

“Quite easily, Harry,” Remus replied, his mouth curled into something close to a smirk. “You're my mate, and I love you. What happened was not your fault; you never *asked* to be violated.” Remus pecked a soft kiss to Harry's lips before he repeated, “it's not your fault, Harry—it was *never* your fault.”

“It still *feels* like my fault, though,” Harry said miserably as he rested his head on Remus's shoulder and shuffled forward until they were chest to chest, with Harry's arms linked around

his neck. "If I...I dunno, if I was stronger, better at resisting his Voice, maybe I could've done something to stop him."

"Precious few omegas can throw off an Alpha's Voice," Remus replied, his voice soft and gentle, and Harry let out a little sigh when Remus began to stroke his hair. "Even the strongest of wizards often have difficulty with it, and most would not even consider *trying* to fight it. That you did shows how strong and good you are, Harry, and you are *not* a bad person for what happened to you."

"I still *feel* like one," Harry mumbled miserably, and he heaved a sigh. "Maybe if I was...I dunno, if I was stronger, I could've stopped it..."

"Sirius never could fight it either," Remus murmured, and Harry stilled.

"*Sirius* was an omega?" Harry asked incredulously, jerking back to eye Remus, certain he was just making it up to make him feel better, but to his shock, he saw no lie in his mate's eyes.

"He was," Remus confirmed, his tone grim. "He...I told him to stay behind... *that day*. I ordered him to stay behind, I used my Voice. He was *furios* . But then..."

Remus trailed off, his gaze moving past Harry, and fixing on a point in space, lost in memory.

"Remus?" Harry asked softly, and Remus fixed his gaze once more on Harry. "What happened?"

"Severus," Remus spat, his voice colder and angrier than Harry had ever heard it. "He went to Grimmauld Place and used his Voice to make Sirius accompany us to the Ministry to rescue you. Of course, Sirius wasn't about to protest it when it would help you, and I didn't want to hinder him while there so I let it slide until we were...were..."

"...safe," Harry filled in, his eyes on the ground. Remus was tense, and Harry could smell his anguish. His own was similar, his throat tight as he thought of his lost godfather. He felt an old hatred for the Potions Master boil up in his stomach, acidic anger he thought he'd long been rid of. *How* could Dumbledore not tell him that it was *Snape* who was responsible for Sirius's death, not himself? He'd carried that guilt with him for *years* , and yet Dumbledore had never *bothered* to clarify just who was at fault on that horrible day.

"I say this to just impart on you that Sirius, for all his strength, still could not fight my Voice, nor Severus's," Remus continued, his words drawing Harry out of his bubble of rage. "It is not a sin to be unable to fight an Alpha's Voice. It is—unfortunately—how nature designed you. The Voice is supposed to be used as a means to protect, not to control, and as a result, the ability an omega has to fight it is very limited. It is natural to abide by it, while something like the Imperius Curse is the opposite—it is *un* natural, and therefore most would try to fight it, not accept it."

"So does that mean if I get myself into a bad situation again, I just...shouldn't bother fighting it?" Harry asked, and he felt an odd sense of relief when Remus smiled and shook his head.

“No, of course not,” he replied as he reached out to touch Harry's cheek. “I feel like it would go against every aspect of your character to *not* fight it. However, I mean only that if you find that you are unable to go against an Alpha's Voice, you do not need to hate yourself for such a failure. You tried, and you should feel pride in that.”

“It doesn't feel like much,” Harry mumbled, sighing as he rested his head on Remus's shoulder. “I hate feeling so...so... *weak* .”

“I'll never see you as weak, Harry,” Remus murmured, brushing his hand across Harry's cheek reverently before he pulled the omega into a soft kiss. “You are not weak; you are the strongest person I have ever known.”

Harry wanted to cry again as Remus pulled him in for another kiss. Harry clung to his mate, and thought that the frequent tearful reactions were the cause of hormones, and not because he'd suddenly gained a more weepy personality.

Instead of dwelling on it, Harry kissed Remus more insistently. Remus let out a soft groan, almost a whine as he suddenly pulled back and pressed a finger to Harry's puckered lips when the omega tried to kiss him again.

“Oh, Harry, you absolute *minx*, ” Remus said with a warm chuckle, and leant in, giving into temptation as he kissed Harry again, but only briefly. “I would still like to *talk*, though. Maybe I did not explain myself as succinctly earlier, but perhaps I should frame it this way—I do not wish you to tell me anything that you don't want to, but I think it would help us if you could at least tell me situations or words that remind you too strongly of what happened while you were... *there* . Mind Healers call them triggers.”

“Triggers?”

“Yes, Triggers,” Remus replied with an affirmative nod. “I did a little research after your first episode when I said...well, you know what I said.” Remus paused, and smiled at Harry sadly. “Triggers are words or situations that do not merely upset you, but take you away from the present, and remind you in horrifying detail of the traumatic event that you do not wish to be reminded of. It can be very upsetting, and that is why I have asked you to tell me just enough about your ordeal that I do not inadvertently trigger you—in the end, it is to avoid hurting you.”

“Oh.” Harry bit his lip, gazing at Remus as he thought over what he had said. Remus *didn't* want to know every tiny, filthy, degrading detail of Harry's time with Lucius, and he *didn't* want to make Harry relive it in the telling.

He wanted to know what scared him, so that Remus would not force Harry's mind to relive it.

That knowledge seemed to rekindle Harry's courage, and he felt his heart swell in his chest as he realized, once again, how Remus truly *did* love him.

“I...I...I can't be told t-to disrobe,” Harry mumbled, his face pressed into Remus's shoulder as he spoke. “That word in particular. I can't get undressed in front of other people anymore, or...or...touch myself, you know, for show, and...the Voice.”

Harry felt his face burn with shame, but Remus did not react with shock or anger to his words. Instead, he rubbed Harry's back consolingly, and kissed his hair.

“It's all right, Harry,” Remus murmured as he held him almost childlike in his arms. “I promise you that I will never do any of those things, or ask any of them of you. You have my word.”

Harry responded by tucking his head into the crook of Remus's neck, and scented him. He felt Remus chuckle warmly, and his arms tightened around him. He let out a little sigh, content and reassured by Remus's promise, reminding him, not for the first time, how Remus was *nothing* like Lucius.

Harry opened his mouth, intent on suggesting they move their activities to the bedroom—or *attempt* to, given how unpredictable Harry's reactions to things had been lately—when Teddy's almighty wail suddenly broke through the silence.

Harry and Remus shared an exasperated smile. Without a word, Harry slid from Remus's lap and allowed him to go and tend to his son, while Harry did his best to ignore the first tendrils of anxiety that began to cloud his mind in response to the sound.

Chewing his lip thoughtfully, Harry listened to the soft, consoling voice of Remus tending to the after-effects of Teddy's nightmare. Harry winced at the subsequent wail when Remus told him, “*no, you have to stay in your own bed, sweetheart* .”

Harry thought back to Teddy's session with the mind healer in that moment, and Remus's gentle suggestion that Harry see someone himself, if nothing else, to address these *triggers* that Remus spoke about.

Or, at the very least, deal with his negative reactions when he heard Teddy cry.

Harry still didn't like the idea of it—the notion that Lucius somehow managed to *break* him made it feel wrong to accept help somehow. Harry had gotten through so much worse, why was it this ordeal with *Lucius* that sparked such anguish in him?

And yet, if nothing else, Harry longed to banish the hurt the foul man had caused, and move forward with his mate to a life that was not shadowed by trauma.

For Remus, perhaps it was worth a shot.

Family

Chapter Notes

A/N: Thank you guys for your patience! Next update will be Monday, July 15th. Enjoy!

Chapter Nineteen – Family

Hogwarts looked the same as it always did; it even *smelled* the same.

Harry could not help but smile at this realization as he, Remus, and Teddy headed down the familiar passageways and towards the Hospital Wing. They nodded at the teachers and ghosts that passed them by as they went, except perhaps Peeves, who blew a raspberry when Teddy waved at him merrily.

Harry smiled indulgently, memory upon memory overlapping one another while his free hand fell to his flat stomach. He ran his palm across it, the fabric of his T-shirt bunching up and tickling the skin in a pleasant sort of way, and he felt a thrill of familiar excitement rush through him.

The weak April sunshine had Teddy particularly excited, even more than Harry was. His birthday was in a week, and today was a doubly exciting day for him—at last, he was going to see the *baby*.

Remus and Harry had held off on letting Teddy see the Birth Image photographs that Pomfrey had produced for them over the last few visits, at least until the end of Harry's first trimester. Remus believed—and Harry agreed—that if something were to happen, Teddy would be able to process it more easily if he did not have any memories of actually *seeing* his unborn sibling.

But now, at last at the end of that first trimester, Remus had conceded that now was a good time to let Teddy come along, especially now that his anxiety over everything had finally begun to ebb.

It had been a trying two months, to say the least. Harry and Remus made a genuine effort to follow Sarah's rules, and make Teddy sleep in his own bed despite the continuous temper-tantrums that always followed.

At first, it had been nothing short of torture. Teddy cried and screamed every night for a week. Harry tried to help in order to give Remus a break, but his anxiety would only amplify upon seeing the tear-stained face of the toddler, and Harry would have to leave the room again before he, too, broke down and made the situation even worse.

It had taken several weeks and many more visits to Sarah before Teddy began to calm in earnest, realizing that despite sleeping alone, nothing bad had happened. Remus even bought Teddy a music box that played soft, calming tones, and that seemed to aid in Teddy sleeping peacefully through the night, rather than waking up every few hours screaming.

Sarah in particular seemed rather pleased with Remus's decision to purchase the music box, because, as she said, “not everything can be fixed with potions or magic.”

The sleep-filled nights had done wonderful things for Teddy's psyche. However, he was still nervous about being away from Harry, and still rather shy around other children, despite Harry and Remus's efforts to encourage him to play when they took him to the park, or down to St Mungo's daycare centre.

Harry had truly begun to feel as though it was a lost cause, until one fateful day when Teddy was sitting and colouring at one of the daycare's little tables, when a young girl about Teddy's age shyly inched towards the table. A colouring book was clutched in her arms, and she sat nervously at the opposite side of the table. When it appeared as though Teddy would not ask her to leave, she began to quietly share Teddy's box of crayons with him.

Her name was Leigh, and those first few times Teddy saw her at the daycare, they would merely share the crayon box in silence.

After a while however, Teddy slowly began to open up.

“You're colouring a cat,” Teddy stated, and she nodded silently. “But...cats aren't pink.”

“This one is pink,” Leigh replied without looking up from her work.

“My cat is black,” Teddy stated. “His name is Bath.”

“That's a funny name,” she replied, again not lifting her gaze from the colouring book in front of her. Teddy scowled, as though he didn't quite know how to react to that, and went back to colouring his trains a little more viciously than he had before.

At the end of the afternoon, Leigh shyly handed Teddy a folded-up sheet from the book, and it contained a black cat that she had coloured for him.

Following that day, Remus had helped Teddy frame the picture from his new friend before they hung it in his room, and ever so slowly, Leigh and Teddy began to open up to each other.

“D'you have any brothers or sisters?” Leigh asked.

“Not yet,” Teddy said proudly, “my Uncle Harry is still growing me one.”

“I have three brothers. They're all big. Mama gets real mad when they call me an ax-dent, but I dunno what that is!”

“I'll ask Daddy if you want, he knows *everything!*”

Harry smiled indulgently as he recalled the past few weeks, and all that had transpired—in particular, Teddy's eagerness to verify anything his new friend said, from what it means when someone calls someone an *accident*, to why the sky is blue and not purple, to yet *more* questions on how babies were made, thanks in no small part to Leigh's enthusiastic albeit deeply flawed knowledge on the topic.

Teddy's new friend and his sleep-filled nights were better to focus on, as far as Harry was concerned, than his own road to recovery, which had been rife with pitfalls.

Harry smiled grimly, but he tried not to think on it. He did like his Mind Healer, Robert, who Harry had acquired from a private practice, rather than through St Mungo's. However, he didn't quite like Robert's unwillingness to let Harry fester in his trauma, or coast through his life. He made Harry look, *really look* at how his attitude was affecting not only those around him, but himself as well, and how strongly his outlook on life affected his ability to cope with his trauma.

Robert was tough, but Harry thought that was good. His no-bullshit approach always snapped Harry to attention, and though Harry often left their sessions feeling like all his energy had been sapped, in the long run, he *did* feel better. He'd even managed to undress in front of Remus recently, albeit under the covers, before they made careful love to each other.

It was a step—a *good* step in the right direction.

“Uncle Harry, am I really going to see the baby today?”

Teddy's sweet little voice snapped Harry from his musings, and he grinned down at the boy before he reached out to ruffle his hair affectionately.

“Yep, you are,” Harry affirmed.

“How?” Teddy asked, “will Madam Pomflea take the baby out to show me, and then put it back?”

“Pom *frey*, Ted,” Harry said with a huff of laughter. “No, that would hurt the baby if she tried that. She's going to use magic to take a picture inside my tummy, and that's what we're going to see.”

“Oh.”

Teddy paused, his lips twisted into a thoughtful expression, his eyes fixed on Harry's stomach.

“How big will the picture be? 'Cause I still don't see the baby, Uncle Harry.”

“Big enough for you to see everything,” Harry promised, smiling. “It's a *special* picture.”

Teddy smiled at that, and Remus gazed at Harry over the boy's head, his expression warm, approving, and full of love.

~*~

“Good afternoon, Harry,” Pomfrey said as Harry, Remus, and Teddy let themselves into the Hospital Wing. She was smiling at them despite being bowed over a student in Ravenclaw Quidditch robes, barely distinguishable under the mud, and with a particularly dazed look on her face. “I have the partition set up for you next to my office. Go and get changed while I deal with this, and I shall be with you shortly.”

“All right,” Harry agreed, while Remus nodded his thanks, and Teddy waved merrily before they all headed over to the hospital bed that had been sectioned off for Harry's use.

Harry slipped inside after he instructed Teddy and Remus to wait outside for him while he changed into the hospital robes. They were not unlike an ordinary hospital gown, though they were longer, reaching down to his ankles, instead of stopping at his knees.

Despite having been told to wait outside, Remus slipped into the space just after Harry had pulled the garment on. There was a devilish look on his face as he moved over to Harry, wrapped his arms around his mate, and kissed him deeply.

“What are you *doing* ?” Harry hissed between giggles, and Remus smirked as he ran his hands down Harry's sides, across his arse, and up his back, making Harry shiver pleasantly.

“I'm just ensuring that you got the hospital robes on properly,” Remus replied with an air of innocence to his voice that Harry did not believe for a second. “These little ties at the back of your neck, for example...they can come undone so *easily* ...” he tugged on one, and Harry let out a soft yelp as the top half of the robes came undone, and toppled down to expose his upper body to Remus.

“ *See* ?” Remus purred, leaning in to kiss Harry again while his large, warm hands moved to Harry's front, teasing his nipples, tickling his skin, and making Harry gasp into the kiss. “All these little ties are just so... *complex* .”

“Love, I know you're dying for a shag, you always are when the Moon is close, but can you *please* hold off until we get home?” Harry asked between soft giggles as Remus continued to explore his body, though he did very little to stop his alpha from doing so. It was hard to say no when it always felt so *good* . “Pomfrey is gonna be here any second, and your son is *right outside*—”

“Daddy, have you fixed Uncle Harry's clothes yet?” Teddy called—loudly. Harry groaned, and hid his face in Remus's shoulder, while the alpha began to snicker.

Hastily, and with a modicum of reluctance, Harry shrugged back into the robes, and Remus helped Harry tie them shut, just as Pomfrey let herself in. She was closely followed by Teddy, who had come upon a lollipop at some point during Harry and Remus's absence, and he was sucking on it merrily.

“Care for some ice water, Mr Lupin?” Pomfrey asked idly, and Harry smirked as he watched the older man turn bright red.

“I’m fine, Madam,” Remus replied awkwardly, and Harry barely managed to swallow a laugh.

“Daddy wants a shag, Uncle Harry said so!” Teddy piped up, which made Remus turn, if possible, even redder. This time, Harry could not control himself, and he let out a choking snort of laughter. “Missus Pomflea, I think you should give him one.”

“I do believe that is something your godfather would rather give to him,” Pomfrey replied crisply, without a note of embarrassment in her voice.

Remus looked to Harry, his expression pleading, but Harry merely responded, “ *you* were the one who insisted on teaching him to talk.”

Teddy appeared particularly perplexed by Harry's statement, while Pomfrey let out a little cough, as though she was covering up a laugh.

“Come onto the bed, Harry,” Pomfrey instructed as she coughed again, and immediately regained her usual no-nonsense composure. “Let's have a look at you, and see how your child is doing.”

“I wanna see, I wanna see!” Teddy immediately cried, and tried to bolt forward, but Remus caught the boy around the middle, and hoisted him up into his arms.

“What did I tell you, Teddy?” he asked sternly, speaking with Teddy held aloft in one arm, while his opposite hand rested at Harry's back, guiding him to the bed.

“Inside voices,” Teddy mumbled, his eyes downcast. “Sorry, Daddy.”

“No harm done, son,” Remus replied, smiling at the boy. “I know you're excited, but you must give the matron room to work. She is doing us a big favour by conducting Harry's examinations at all, instead of at the hospital.”

“That's right,” Harry supplied as he settled down, and patted the end of the bed invitingly. Teddy's expression brightened in an instant, and he wiggled in Remus's arms until he gave in and put the boy down. Teddy immediately raced over to clamber onto the end of the bed. “Madam Pomfrey is supposed to only take care of students here, but I work at the hospital, so I felt that it'd be weird to have my colleagues take care of me, so I asked Madam Pomfrey to do it.”

“Oh.” Teddy thought about this while his eyes drifted over to the matron. “Why would it be weird?”

“They sometimes call it a *conflict of interest*,” Remus supplied as he sat down on the chair next to Harry's bed, and took the omega's hand. “It means that if you know the person, for example, if your colleague needs medical attention, you cannot do your job as well because you know them personally.”

“It's usually not so big a deal,” Harry added, “I've been to St Mungo's before for things, but this is a *big* thing, and I wanted to be taken care of properly, so to make sure of that, we asked the matron.”

“And given how much time I've spent treating him for all the ridiculous stunts he pulled in school, precious few know him like I do,” Pomfrey added primly, and Harry grinned at her.

“All right,” she continued as she snapped on a pair of dragonhide gloves, “Harry, I am going to open your robes, just to expose your stomach, then I shall continue with the procedure, all right?”

Harry knew all this, in part from his training as a Healer, and in part from his previous visits with her. However, Harry had a feeling that Pomfrey was partially saying it for Teddy's benefit, who was listening to the matron raptly.

When Harry nodded, the Matron waved her wand, creating a circular opening in the robes where his stomach was.

Remus's hand tensed in Harry's, while Teddy's eyes were narrowed as he gazed at Harry's stomach, determined not to miss anything.

“Are you ready, Harry?” Pomfrey asked as she rolled a contraption over, like an easel with a canvas, and Harry nodded at once.

“Yeah,” Harry said.

“Me too,” Teddy added, which made all the adults chuckle warmly.

The matron got to work, selecting a small jar of mint-green salve from a shelf affixed to the back of the easel. She twisted off the top, and scooped out a walnut-sized glob before she proceeded to spread it on Harry's exposed abdomen, turning his skin a bright pastel-green.

Harry's stomach sucked in a little, and when Teddy gazed at him with concern he smiled at his godson and explained, “cold.”

“Why are you making Uncle Harry cold?” Teddy immediately asked, his lips twitched into a small frown, and Pomfrey chuckled again at Teddy's question.

“The salve is a little cold, but I promise that I am not doing it intentionally, young man,” she replied as she put the lid back on, and used her wand to clean the remnants of the salve off her gloved hands. “It will warm up in a moment, not to worry.”

Teddy relaxed only when Harry and Remus nodded in affirmation, and again he fixed his eyes on Harry's stomach.

“Your tummy looks like a coloured Easter egg, Uncle Harry,” Teddy announced, and Harry huffed a laugh.

“Yeah, Ted, I s'pose it does,” Harry agreed as he looked down at himself. “And that Easter egg has your sibling in it.”

“But your tummy isn't made of chocolate,” Teddy said, pouting a little, and when Harry glanced to Remus, he saw that the older man was visibly trying to hide a smirk, as though he was tempted to say something that *definitely* wasn't appropriate for Teddy's ears.

“All right, Harry, let's see how your baby is doing today,” Pomfrey said, breaking up the conversation, and as Harry smiled, nodding at the matron, while Teddy bounced excitedly in place a few times, making the bed wiggle.

Pomfrey tapped the canvas, making it turn black. Teddy watched attentively, his eyes wide and unblinking, as though he was determined that he not miss a thing.

Pomfrey hovered her wand above Harry's stomach, and with a muttered incantation, Harry felt a warmth envelop his abdomen, just as the image of their unborn child bloomed onto the canvas.

“There's your baby,” Pomfrey said warmly.

Harry had seen his child many times over the last weeks, but as with every time, it always felt like the first time.

A black background, with a thin white line in a circle to indicate the womb, and in the centre, his *child*.

“How big are they right now?” Harry asked, smiling in embarrassment from how croaky his voice was. When he glanced to Remus, he saw that his alpha was not faring much better, and bore both glassy eyes and a watery smile.

“About the size of a plum,” Pomfrey replied as she began to motion to the image. “They look healthy, head and body all the appropriate size for this stage, heartbeat nice and strong—”

“—Daddy, my brother has a *big* wee-wee!” Teddy suddenly interrupted, and pointed to the umbilical cord, which made Harry fall back on the hospital bed as he began to howl with laughter.

“Teddy, that's the *umbilical cord*,” Remus explained, his voice tight, as though he was trying hard not to laugh. “That's how the baby eats. You had one too.”

“I did?”

“Yes. They remove it when you're born, and you're left with a belly button.”

Remus reached out to poke Teddy's navel, and he giggled.

The rest of the visit went on pleasantly enough, with frequent albeit endearing interruptions from Teddy, and a few bottles of heartburn potion for Harry to take home, for which he was deeply grateful.

“Here are your copies from the Birth Image session,” Pomfrey said at the end, handing an envelope to Harry, which he hugged to his chest. “I take it that Teddy is rather excited about having a sibling?”

“*Ecstatic*,” Harry replied with a chuckle. “He can't wait to be a big brother. He talks to my stomach all the time.”

Harry glanced over to where Teddy and Remus were playing, leaving Harry to finish up the visit privately. They were doing a puzzle together, and though the lollipop that Teddy had been given was long since finished, the stick was still protruding from his mouth, as though he was loath to get rid of it.

“I'm going to adopt him,” Harry announced, smiling as he said it.

“That's wonderful news, Harry,” Pomfrey said, smiling approvingly when Harry looked back to the matron. “Does Teddy know yet?”

“The paperwork isn't fully in order yet, but we're hoping to have it all ready by his fourth birthday,” Harry explained with a weak smile. “Is it stupid that I'm really nervous about it? I worry about making Teddy feel like...like I'm replacing his mum. I don't ever want him to feel like I'm better than Tonks was...or something.”

“That might be something to discuss with your mind healer, not me,” Pomfrey pointed out, eyeing Harry with a familiar look of concern.

“I have, and he's helped a lot, but...” Harry trailed off, and sighed. “Sorry, I'm being stupid.”

“I don't think it's stupid, Harry,” Pomfrey said. “But I do think adopting him, beyond being the *right* thing to do, it is also quite *practical*. Should—heaven forbid—something happen to Remus, your rights to Teddy's guardianship would be severely hampered by the fact that you and Teddy are not related in some sort of legal sense. An adoption ensures that you can continue raising him, rather than having Teddy sent elsewhere. It is not as though you wish to erase Nymphadora from Teddy's memory, and I believe I know you well enough that you will do all that you can to ensure that Teddy had a wealth of memories of his mother. You want to adopt him because you love him; that much is obvious to me.”

“That's what everyone keeps saying,” Harry said, laughing weakly as he tried to ignore the wetness in his eyes. “I mean, I know all that, but it's hard to think about. I can't imagine my life without Remus in it, you know?”

“I know,” Pomfrey replied, her voice softening as she offered Harry a reassuring smile. “It's never easy to think about for anyone. You love Remus, it's as plain as day.”

“I do.” Harry paused, and dropped his gaze to his lap. “Honestly, I don't know what I'd do without him or Teddy around. They keep me sane. They're...my family.”

“All the more reason to make sure that Teddy is taken care of, Harry,” Pomfrey said as she moved forward in order to lightly pat the top of Harry's hand in a reassuring sort of way. “As long as you ensure that Nymphadora's memory remains alive, you shall never be replacing her. Remember that.”

“Thanks,” Harry said, still smiling as he stood up. “I'll remember.”

“Come back and see me in a fortnight for another appointment,” she said, “and good luck with the adoption.”

Harry nodded, smiling at her again before he turned and walked towards where Remus and Teddy were waiting.

Birthday

Chapter Notes

A/N: Next update is scheduled for July 28th. Enjoy!

Chapter Twenty – Birthday

In the week leading up to Teddy's birthday, Harry often joked that he could not tell who was more excited—Teddy, or Remus.

Harry pointed this out often after Teddy went to bed (with gradually fewer hissy fits as time went on), and Remus would chuckle, though he never gave Harry a proper answer, beyond telling Harry that it was *normal* to be excited about the birthday of his child, never once mentioning the gift that he and Harry planned to give Teddy on that special day.

This was further evidenced when Harry woke alone in bed on the Saturday morning of Teddy's birthday. However, the sweet aroma of far too much breakfast food told Harry both where his mate was, and what he was up to.

Harry opted to take his time that morning despite his rumbling stomach. He showered, shaved, and dressed, and by the time he made it to their little kitchen table, it was full of all manner of breakfast foods, including scrambled eggs, toast, blueberry scones, sausage, bacon, fried tomatoes, and potatoes, along with pumpkin juice and plenty of tea.

“Oh, this looks lovely,” Harry said as he kissed Remus in greeting before he sat down across from his godson, who offered him a ketchupy grin from the metric ton of the stuff he'd dumped onto his eggs. “One might think it was someone's *birthday*. Now, let me see...could it be...is it...Daddy's birthday?”

“No, Uncle Harry!”

“Oh, wait, I know, it's Gran's birthday, isn't it?”

“No, Uncle Harry!” Teddy cried, with more giggling and enthusiasm this time.

“Is it... *my* birthday?”

"It's *my* birthday, Uncle Harry!" Teddy said, laughing heartily at his godfather's silliness.

"Goodness gracious, *is it* ? I had no idea!" Harry cried, which made Remus smile and Teddy laugh harder. "And how old are you now, Teddy? No, wait, I know this one! You're forty-seven now, right?"

"Uncle Harry, *no!* " Teddy cried again. "I'm *four* now. It's this many."

Teddy held up four sticky fingers as evidence, and Harry made a show of carefully counting each digit, which made Teddy continue to giggle.

"Well, Merlin's Beard, Teddy, you're right, you *are* four. Happy Birthday!"

"Thank you, Uncle Harry!" Teddy chirped happily, still giggling even as his father snuck a little fresh fruit onto his plate in the sea of egg and sausage. "Today my friend is coming over with her mummy and daddy, and Daddy said that Gran is coming, and *all* the Wheezies, and I get to have a cake, and a party, and *presents!* "

"Oh, presents, eh?" Harry asked as he grinned at his godson. "Do I get any?"

"You get some on *your* birthday, Uncle Harry," Teddy said knowledgeably, before he stuffed another forkful of eggs into his mouth, and Harry laughed.

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After breakfast, Harry was tasked with helping Teddy clean up. Teddy had spattered his face and clothes with more ketchup than Harry thought was even possible, while Remus took care of the dishes.

After Harry helped Teddy change into a fresh set of clothes, Harry *casually* suggested to Teddy that they go to the park, and the toddler clearly thought that that was a *brilliant* idea.

Doing his best to hide his grin, Harry slipped into the kitchen to kiss Remus goodbye before Harry and Teddy left the house and walked down the pavement hand-in-hand towards the nearby park.

"How come Daddy isn't coming to the park too?" Teddy asked abruptly, his words almost muffled, and Harry glanced down to see Teddy had popped his thumb into his mouth.

"Your Daddy had stuff to do at the house," Harry explained vaguely, unwilling to spoil the surprise of what he and Remus had planned. "You know how your Daddy *loves* to clean. He probably wants us out of his hair until he finishes making everything spick and span."

"What's spick and span?" Teddy asked curiously, cocking his head to the side a little, but he removed his thumb from his mouth, giving Harry the impression that he was no longer unsettled by the idea of leaving his father behind.

“Erm...well...it means to make something really clean,” Harry explain awkwardly. “Er...I dunno why. Maybe there were two blokes named Spick and Span who really liked cleaning things, one did the windows, and one did the floors...”

“I'm Spick!” Teddy announced as they walked. “You can be Span. Span does floors.”

“Okay, then,” Harry agreed, laughing a little, and he was gifted with a wide, beaming smile.

At the park, Teddy came up with a tag game involving Spick and Span, where Harry was Germs, and had to chase Teddy around. It was great fun, and involved a lot of squealing from Teddy, until Harry, sweaty and dirty, begged for a short break.

Teddy, still full of energy, conceded, and followed Harry to the swings. Harry demonstrated how to make himself move, though Teddy seemed to struggle to replicate it, and instead he drifted lazily with the wind while he gazed at his godfather.

“Daddy said I need to be careful with you today,” Teddy suddenly said, and Harry turned to him, his brow knitted in confusion over Teddy's statement.

“Did he, now?”

“Yes,” Teddy replied, humming in agreement. “Daddy said...he said...because of my baby brother, you get tired a lot, and I need to be careful to not tire you out, because it might hurt you or my brother.”

“Well, your daddy is too much of a worrywart, I think,” Harry replied, smiling at his godson reassuringly. “I'm fine, and being a little tired from our game doesn't mean you've hurt the baby, okay?”

“Okay, Uncle Harry,” Teddy agreed readily, making Harry smile.

~*~

Harry and Teddy played for a few hours, until lunchtime. Despite it being Saturday, the park was curiously devoid of kids, but Harry made up for it as best he could by playing with Teddy. Unfortunately, like his father, Teddy frequently insisted that they stop and take breaks, so as to not tire Harry out.

Harry didn't quite know how to reassure Teddy that he was perfectly fine without hurting the boy's feelings, and his gentle hints that he wasn't tired seemed to fall on deaf ears. As a result, he would nod and rest while he watched Teddy go down the slide over and over until the boy decided that Harry was rested up enough to continue their game.

They walked back to the house when Harry casually complained that he was getting hungry, and Teddy promptly *insisted* that they go home to feed the baby.

Harry grinned internally, his eyes on Teddy as they went. The boy appeared entirely unsuspecting, and even when Harry insisted on using a cleaning charm on both of them. Teddy never questioned why, nor protested, but merely conceded to Harry's insisted that they clean up without complaint.

Teddy did not even seem to notice the flutter of movement inside the house from the sitting room window as they reached home. However, he most certainly *did* notice when they stepped inside, and a cluster of over twenty people shouted, *SURPRISE!*

And Teddy was indeed surprised. So much so, his eyes went wide and he fell back onto his bottom before he began to cry—loudly.

“Oh, dear,” Molly said, bringing a hand to her mouth while Remus hurried forward and scooped the boy up even as he continued to wail.

“Teddy, what's the matter?” Remus asked, rubbing his back, even while Teddy continued to sob. Harry stepped forward to join Remus, and touched Teddy's little shoulder gently, offering their guests an apologetic look while Teddy kept crying. “Teddy, please, what's wrong?”

“*N-Nothing!*” Teddy screamed with a faceful of tears. “*I'm happy, Daddy!*”

He didn't look it, and Harry glanced up to Remus uncertainly.

“I'll be just a mo',” Remus said softly to Harry. “Poor thing, he's probably just a bit overwhelmed. I'll be right back.”

Without another word, Remus turned and dashed out of the sitting room with Teddy still held aloft in his arms.

“Well, that was certainly disastrous, Potter.”

Harry knew that voice.

His head snapped to the left. Past Percy, Audrey, and Andromeda, Harry's eyes fell upon the couple that standing just behind them, the omega bearing a winning smirk as he regarded Harry.

Harry's mouth dropped open.

“*Malfoy?*” Harry sputtered, his mouth hanging agape, unable to decide what he wanted to demand first—why Draco Malfoy was in his house, or why he was holding hands with Charlie Weasley. “What—what on *earth* are you doing here?”

“Your husband invited all the Weasleys and their spouses,” Draco replied smoothly, his mouth twitched into a vague smirk. “Which, lucky for you, includes me.”

A tugging on Harry's sleeve distracted him from answering. He glanced down he saw Leigh, a lolly in her mouth, and her big brown eyes were gazing up at Harry imploringly.

“Yeah, Leigh?” Harry asked, immediately crouching down to her level, and Draco scoffed a little, though this time Harry had no idea what was bugging the great prat, and instead focused his attention on the toddler.

“Is—is Teddy okay?” she asked, her voice thick around the sweet. “He was really sad a-fore. He went away a long time.”

“Yeah,” Harry agreed. “Sometimes Teddy cries not because he's sad, but because a lot is happening, and he doesn't know what to do. It's not anyone's fault, not really. He'll be okay, and he'll be back here soon, I promise.”

“You for-promise?” Leigh asked, her eyes wide, and Harry chuckled softly as he reached out to gently pat her head, making her giggle.

“Yeah, I promise.”

Not even a full minute later, Remus returned with a significantly calmer Teddy in his arms, who was tightly hugging his bear. His eyes were a little red, but he was smiling, which only brightened when the large cluster of people started to applaud, making his smile brighten, rather than cause him to dissolve into another meltdown.

Leigh hurried over to Remus and Teddy, and tugged on the hem of Remus's shirt until he let the boy down, and the two friends hugged, and making most of the adults coo at the sweet scene before them.

“All right, mate?”

Harry turned, and grinned at Ron and Hermione. Hermione pulled Harry into a tight hug, while Ron clapped him on the back.

“Blimey, it's been ages, hasn't it?” Harry said as the crowd began to slowly disperse, some going to greet Teddy and wish him a happy birthday, while others formed their own little groups in order to chat. Harry noticed that Draco and Charlie were off on their own, hanging near the dining room table. It was leaden with nibbles, and the couple were both sporting a glass of wine while they talked quietly.

“Yeah,” Hermione agreed, drawing Harry's attention back to his friends. “I guess it's that thing about growing up—you're suddenly too busy to spend all your time with your friends.”

“It still feels sort of wrong though, doesn't it?” Harry asked. “I mean, we spent every second together at school, and now I haven't seen you two in *months* .”

“Be fair, you were a bit busy with a new husband, new kid, getting kidnapped by an evil git, getting knocked up, and then *possibly* getting sacked,” Ron said with a grin, parroting

everything that Harry had told his friends in their letters. “Though possibly not in that order. Did I miss anything?”

“You forgot Teddy's *big surprise* after cake tonight,” Harry said with a wry smirk, and Ron started to laugh.

The party went rather smoothly after Harry and Teddy's dramatic entrance. Harry still felt a little guilty for not realizing earlier that such a big group of people may trigger Teddy's anxiety, but Remus did not appear quite as fazed by it.

“Kids at this age are still working out how their emotions work, so to speak,” Remus explained patiently when they were both in the kitchen preparing dinner. “I've seen Teddy cry over all sort of things that don't make sense—I took him to the park one day to feed the ducks, and he was so excited by how fluffy the ducklings were that he started to cry. Another time, I gave him a peeled clementine and he ate the whole thing, then promptly started to cry when he realized he had no more clementine. It's a normal kid reaction; I don't think we need to worry, Harry.”

Harry wasn't so sure about this, but he hummed non-committally as he opened the oven (which had been magically enlarged on the inside) and he used his wand to baste the two dozen roasting Cornish hens, while Remus tended to the side-dishes. Teddy's birthday cake was already prepared and set aside under a Disillusionment Charm so that the boy wouldn't try and sneak fingerfuls of icing when Harry and Remus weren't looking.

Harry smiled to himself as he straightened up, his eyes falling on the kitchen window that looked out on the back garden. Teddy and Leigh were running around exuberantly, with little Victoire toddling along behind them, laughing loudly. Teddy, despite his general misgivings of playing with Victoire, would often stop and encourage her to follow them, making it clear that he valued the idea of playing fairly.

Another smile tugged at Harry's lips, paired with a thrill of excitement as he thought again to his and Remus's gift for Teddy while he reluctantly tore his eyes away, and returned to helping Remus prepare the meal.

In a very Weasleyish manner, Harry and Remus called everyone into the back garden for dinner, where two picnic tables had been arranged end to end, with a long violet tablecloth covering it—Teddy's favourite colour. There were banners and streamers trailing from the sides of the house and over the trees, which made the space take on a childlike whimsy that made Harry smile.

Once everyone was seated and properly lubricated with wine, butterbeer, or pumpkin juice, Harry and Remus once again used their wands to conduct a long procession of plates, each one containing a little Cornish hen, though the servings for the children were much smaller and cut up for them, in order to accommodate their littler tummies.

As a final touch, Harry and Remus laid out serving bowls of the side dishes—freshly baked rolls, buttered peas and carrots, and roasted new potatoes with rosemary. Everyone shouted compliments for the food at them all at once, but it was so garbled that Harry couldn't discern one out of the others.

Remus sat Teddy at the head of the table, which made him blush. The guests, perhaps understanding Teddy's ability to cope with too much stimuli a little better, did not cause a fuss over it, and made a point of taking turns when speaking to him.

Harry sat on Teddy's left, and Leigh on Teddy's right, followed by Remus and Leigh's parents, Luke and Delilah. Ron and Hermione were next to Harry, followed by the cluster of Andromeda, the rest of the Weasleys, and their spouses.

“Blimey, Harry,” Ron said as he split his hen open. “You're going to put my mum's cooking to *shame*. Where on earth did you get chickens this small?”

“They're prob'ly babies,” Leigh interjected knowledgeably around a mouthful of bread and butter. “Babies are littler than grown-ups, that's why I'm little and you're big.”

“Sweetheart, swallow before you keep talking,” Delilah added in a soft tone of voice as she daintily cut into her own hen. “It would not do to sully your friend's party by choking.”

“They're Cornish hens, Ron,” Harry added with a small grin while the redhead goggled at Leigh, apparently at a loss for how to respond to the little girl's remark. “That's why they're so little.”

“How come I didn't get a whole one like you, Uncle Harry?” Teddy asked, his bottom lip poked out in a slight pout. “I want a chicken just for me!”

“Because they have lots of little bones that you sometimes can't see, Ted,” Remus filled in before Harry could respond. “We didn't want you, Leigh, or Victoire to hurt yourselves, so we cut them for you. When you're a little older you can have a whole one.”

“How much older do I need to be before I can have my own chicken?” Teddy asked eagerly, and Remus smiled at Teddy fondly.

“Let's say, after Hogwarts but before you can drink,” Remus replied, and Harry snorted into his forkful of potatoes.

The dinner went brilliantly, with Teddy excitedly chattering away with his friend, while Harry was able to catch up with Ron and Hermione, like nothing had changed between them.

After the meal, Remus brought out his masterpiece—a three-layer chocolate cake topped with chocolate-covered strawberries and curls of milk chocolate. *Happy Birthday* was sung brilliantly off-key, while Teddy applauded the cake excitedly, and blew too hard on the candles, showering the cake in spit. Harry was a bit too hasty in removing Teddy's finishing touch to the cake, and accidentally removed all the icing along with the saliva, which made

Remus let out a little half-scream at Harry's accidental desecration, while Hermione hastily put it right again.

"I think you just saved our marriage, or mating, or whatever we have, Hermione," Harry said through his fingers, hiding his face while Remus cut the cake, which made his friend laugh loudly.

"Marriage works, I think," she said in between giggles as she helped Remus pass out the cake slices, given that Harry was momentarily too incapacitated by his embarrassment to help.

"Have some cake and stop your moaning, love," Remus said teasingly as he set a plate in front of Harry, complete with a chocolate-covered strawberry. "Lucky for you, Hermione was here to fix your crass mistake."

Harry eyed Remus, who was smiling placidly at him, but there was a distinct twinkle in his eye that told Harry that he would likely pay for his mistake later—in the most pleasurable way possible.

"Daddy, is it present time yet?" Teddy asked around a mouthful of chocolate, and Remus smiled warmly as he patted Teddy's head affectionately.

"Soon, after everyone has had their cake."

"That's a long time, Daddy."

"Yeah, it is, Ted," Harry agreed as he plucked the strawberry off his plate and nibbled at it, just enough to tease Remus, but not enough for anyone else to truly notice what he was doing. "But don't worry, it will be soon. I promise."

It quickly became apparent that *soon* was more like half an hour, and as Harry watched the group finish their cake, he found himself getting cautiously excited.

Remus, despite his attempts at appearing as calm and casual as ever, bore a similar look. Harry bit his lip, somewhat stifling his grin, and Remus nodded, bowing forward just enough to touch Harry's hand under the table in quiet reassurance.

"Present time?" Teddy asked again, his eyes wide and hopeful as Remus began to summon everyone's empty plates, while the guests began to pull impossibly large wrapped boxes out of impossibly small pockets, and Remus laughed warmly.

"Yes, yes, all right," Remus conceded as he magicked the plates to the kitchen, and turned his attention to the group. "Who would like to go first?"

Teddy was so excited by the prospect of *presents* that it was a wonder that the boy didn't explode. After an initial squabble of who would get to go first, Remus had the group draw straws, which in Harry's estimation was a rather good tactic, as both grandmotherly figures—that is, Andromeda and Molly—seemed almost ready to come to blows.

Most amusingly, at least, for Harry, was the fact that it was Draco who had been allowed to go first.

“First time you've come first in anything, eh, Malfoy?” Harry teased, ignoring Hermione as she elbowed him, and the blond smirked at him.

“I dunno about *that* ...” Charlie began, and Draco shot his partner a scathing look, which immediately shut the ginger up.

“Here you are, Theodore,” Draco said smoothly, in a poncy but *almost* polite tone of voice while he handed a thin parcel to the boy.

Teddy ripped into the package without so much as a thank-you, and he let out an excited squeal at the contents.

“A *broom!* ” he cried, holding up the child-sized broom, which had been inscribed with his name in fine gold lettering on one side, and *Nimbus 201* on the other.

“ *Nimbus 201?* ” Harry asked while Teddy continued to gibber excitedly, and Draco smirked again.

“A child line, almost as good as the standard-issue broom, though it does not go as fast nor as high. Charlie informed me that you would not be pleased if your godson wound up splattered across the windscreen of an aeroplane.”

“No, that wouldn't be good,” Harry agreed, smiling a little at his rival—former rival?

“Oi, stop hogging him, Malfoy!” Ron barked when their silent moment had gone on for too long. “It's *our turn!* ”

The procession of gifts went on. Some people offered sweets, some a variety of toys, and Teddy was particularly taken with the plush black cat that Leigh gave him, while he only glanced briefly at the stack of storybooks that Hermione offered, which made her sulk, and Ron laugh.

Once all the gifts had been given, and Teddy was still hugging the plush cat tightly, Remus got up, and Harry felt his breath still.

“Teddy, we have one more special gift for you,” Remus began as Harry got up to join him. The few who knew what was going to happen were watching excitedly, while the others looked on with bemused but polite expressions upon their faces.

“Oh, just one more?” Teddy asked, sounding mildly disappointed, which caused Harry to laugh. Unlike Dudley, who would have pitched a fit at getting what he would perceive to be so *few* gifts, there was something oddly endearing about it from Teddy. Presents were a terribly exciting thing when one was four, after all, and Harry couldn't fault him for that.

“Yes, but it's a very special present,” Harry added as he reached for Remus's free hand, gripping it tightly. The older man waved his wand, and a scroll of parchment materialized out of thin air. Harry caught it, and as one, they crouched down in front of Teddy.

“Did you get me drawing paper, Daddy?” Teddy asked curiously, while Harry began to unroll the form, and Remus laughed.

“No, son,” Remus said, chuckling a little as he looked to Harry, and gave him a nod.

“Teddy,” Harry began, “our special present to you, I guess, starts with a question.”

“A question?” Teddy repeated, blinking at him in confusion. “What sort of question?”

“Well, you see...these papers are...” Harry trailed off for a moment, not quite certain how to phrase it, but Remus did not sweep in and help him. Instead he nodded encouragingly, and waited.

“I want to ask you a very important question, Ted, and those papers are part of it,” Harry said at last. “We asked the Ministry a very important question, and we wanted your permission before we said yes.

“You see,” Harry continued, “We asked the Ministry if I could adopt you.”

“What's *a dot*?” Teddy asked, his little brow furrowing in confusion, while around them a few of the family members gasped, and Harry could distinctly see Fleur, Molly, and Hermione all wiping away tears from their eyes.

“It means we asked the Ministry if I could be your dad,” Harry explained. “I mean, your *second* dad. I'm not replacing your daddy or your mummy, I just— *urk!*”

Harry yelped as Teddy suddenly lunged at him with an excited shriek, and he fell into the grass with the boy on top of him, while everyone started to laugh.

“Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, *yes!*” Teddy cried as he continued to hug Harry tightly. “You're my other daddy now! Forever and ever! *Yes you can, Other Daddy!*”

Harry felt his throat tighten with emotion as he hugged Teddy close, and lifted him up while Remus covertly dabbed a few tears from his eyes.

With Teddy still held aloft in his arms, Remus unrolled the scroll, and Teddy watched joyously as both Remus and Harry took turns signing the papers (already signed by their legal witnesses, Ron and Hermione), and the moment that Harry finished scribbling his name, the scroll rolled itself up, and vanished.

“It's done,” Harry announced, then turned to Teddy, who was still clinging to his new father tightly. “It's official now, Ted, I'm your dad.”

“I love you, Other Daddy,” Teddy said, and hugged him again, while Harry, eyes full of tears, hugged him back.

“I love you too... *son* .”

Pregnancy

Chapter Notes

A/N: Late, I'm sorry v.v I'll be moving my updates to Tuesday for the foreseeable future, given that this seems to be the soonest I am able to put out a chapter lately and hopefully this will keep me from producing more chapters past my self-appointed deadline. That said, next update will be August 13th. Enjoy!

Chapter Twenty-One – Pregnancy

When Harry first discovered his pregnancy, it had felt more like an abstract idea combined with morning sickness rather than something that was really *real*.

Even after he'd come home, told Remus and Teddy, and seen the birth-images with both his newly adopted son and his mate by his side, it hadn't felt truly *tangible*. It was still merely an idea, and not something that Harry really felt was true.

But as the weeks began to progress into months, a monotonous cycle began. Minding Teddy, seeing Pomfrey, visiting his friends, and spending as much time as he could with Remus. He was so caught up in the activities of his own life that he did not even notice straightaway when he had begun to show, not until Remus pointed it out.

Perhaps given that Remus had missed so much of Tonks's pregnancy due to the war, he seemed almost entranced by Harry's growing stomach. He rubbed his pregnant belly reverently, he pressed kisses to it, and he had become almost annoyingly protective about Harry doing anything he wasn't supposed to—like sneaking a sip of coffee here and there, or lifting things that Remus deemed as *too heavy*.

Though Harry was quick to snap at virtually anyone else who tried that with him, for Remus Harry couldn't quite bring himself to. His alpha was so visibly excited about the baby now that Harry had at last started to show, and he didn't want to take that away from him.

As the months continued, with it came a warm but rainy July, and the promise of Harry's birthday on the horizon. Teddy appeared almost as excited by the impending celebration as he had been by his own, as was Remus, though what the alpha had planned he would never say.

Instead Remus would smile slyly, offer Harry a kiss, and say nothing on the topic.

“So...no clue what he's up to is what you're saying?” Ron ventured, and Harry groaned into his ice-cream.

It was a rare sunny Saturday afternoon a week before Harry's birthday. As a result, Harry, Ron, and Hermione decided to spend it in Diagon Alley. Bags of purchases were tucked under their chairs, and in front of each of them were massive sundaes. Harry's was nearly gone, and he was almost tempted to order a second.

Harry ran a hand over his protruding stomach, and crammed another spoonful of ice-cream into his mouth before he responded thickly, “not a bastard clue. Every time I ask, he does this innocent smile thing that means he has something special planned, but he won't tell me what it is. I just keep reminding him that I want something small, nothing like what we had at Teddy's birthday.”

“Or maybe he's planning nothing, because you forgot his birthday?” Hermione teased, and Harry flushed.

“I didn't mean to,” he protested weakly. “It was right after I got back from...*you know*. I was a bit busy being freaked out. He said he didn't mind, and I *definitely* made it up to him.”

“Oh, how?”

“Hermione,” Ron interjected hastily, his ears turning red, “think before you ask. You might not want to know.”

Harry smirked coyly, just enough for Hermione to get flustered and complain about men being *all groin and no brain*.

Of course, that was fairly far from the truth, given that Harry had taken Remus out to their favourite couples' restaurant in Hogsmeade, and they treated themselves to some fancy French food while Teddy stayed with his Gran for the evening, albeit with a variation of Sirius's old two-way mirror to account for Teddy's separation anxiety at the time.

Harry wanted to keep that sweet evening to himself however, and so allowed his friends to assume that they had some sort of wild sex instead.

“Let's just say it was a lovely evening,” Harry said evasively while Mr Fortescue brought Harry another sundae without him having to ask for it, and he happily dug in. “Anyway, as long as it's a quiet birthday I'll be content. What with the pregnancy and everything, I get worn out much more easily than I'd like.”

“When you're not eating as much as Ron,” Hermione offered, making both boys snort. “Have you and Remus started thinking of names yet?”

“Not yet,” Harry replied, shrugging a little. “I mean, we wanted the sex to be a surprise, but I guess we haven't thought as far enough ahead as names.”

“Well, you're starting to run short on time—”

“—blimey, Hermione,” Ron interrupted, “it's not an exam, and he has three months left. Give a bloke a break.”

“I always liked the idea of naming a baby after they're born,” Harry said thoughtfully as he picked the maraschino cherry off the top of his sundae, and popped it into his mouth.

“Just...seeing the baby and the name coming to you...you know, that sort of thing.”

“I think that's sweet,” Hermione offered with a smile. “sort of...giving a name that applies to your child.”

“Yeah,” Harry agreed, while Ron appeared somewhat at a loss of how to offer his own input.

“Teddy wants to name the baby, *Baby*, though, so I fear for that kid's future offspring.”

Both Ron and Hermione laughed at that, and with a newfound warmth, they shifted their focus to other topics.

~*~

“Honey, I'm home!” Harry called out as he stepped inside, and laughed as Teddy flew into his knees with a *thump*.

“Hi, Other Daddy, hi, Baby!” Teddy said cheerily. “Did you have fun? Daddy said you were going to have fun, even if we weren't there.”

“I just wanted to spend a little time with my friends, Ted,” Harry offered, smiling at him warmly. “It doesn't mean I don't love you or Daddy, but sometimes people need breaks from each other. It's not a bad thing.”

“I think *I* need a break from Daddy,” Teddy said thoughtfully. “Today he made me *clean my room*.”

“I heard that,” Remus said, smiling as he swept into the front hall, momentarily ignoring his son as he swept in to kiss Harry. “Welcome home, love. Did you have a good time with your friends?”

“You know, I think I did,” Harry said, smiling as he caught another kiss from Remus before they parted, just as Teddy began to interject with noises of disgust. “It was a nice change, seeing them when my life or liberty isn't in peril.”

“What's libity?” Teddy interjected curiously, “is it food?”

“No, it's not food, Ted,” Harry said with a warm laugh. “It means freedom.”

“Then why didn't you just *say* that?”

Harry opened his mouth to respond, but found that he had no idea how to explain synonyms to a four-year-old.

“Harry just prefers alliteration,” Remus filled in with a wry smile, and Harry snorted.

“Oh, okay.”

Teddy darted off, calling for Bastet, and Harry shook his head at the boy's retreating back.

“Somehow it doesn't shock me that he knows what *alliteration* means, but not *liberty*,” Harry said with a wry laugh, and Remus responded with a small, amused smirk of his own.

“A few of his story books take the form of narrative poetry,” Remus explained as he slid an arm around Harry's waist and pulled him closer. “It offered an opening for a little lesson in English Literature, though he can't quite say it, and it often comes out as *a-literal-ation*.”

Harry laughed as he kicked off his trainers and let Remus lead him farther into the house. At first, he thought Remus was leading him to the sitting room, but he veered away from it, and instead guided Harry to the kitchen, where their supper of a leg of lamb was roasting in the oven, filling the space with the scent of cooking meat and rosemary.

Harry opened his mouth to ask what Remus was up to, but he was impeded from doing so when Remus's lips covered his in a kiss that was most assuredly *not* for Teddy's eyes.

The kiss made Harry lose himself, it breaking only when Remus tried to pull Harry closer, and he let out a small yelp as he nearly dropped his little bag of purchases, while Remus caught it deftly, before he wrapped an arm around Harry, and kissed him again.

“What's gotten *into* you today?” Harry teased, and Remus replied with a warm, throaty chuckle that nearly made Harry moan aloud with want.

“I was thinking more of how much I want to get into *you*,” Remus replied with a soft purr, which made Harry flush. “Gods above, you smell positively *delectable* when you're pregnant...”

“Hmm...maybe if you behave, we can make an evening of it, but *not* when our son could walk in at any moment...” Harry replied lightly, and both men grinned like fools at Harry's phrasing.

Our son.

It felt so good to say it, even after a few months of it being true. It still felt like such a gift to Harry, and he felt as though he would *never* tire of thinking of Teddy as his son.

“When you smell so good to me, how can you *possibly* expect me to behave?” Remus asked, drawing a laugh from Harry as he hugged him close again.

“Perhaps I was hoping for a miracle,” Harry retorted, then reached into his shopping bag, and produced a smaller paper bag, which he planted in Remus's hands. “Here.”

“What's this?” Remus asked curiously, but Harry didn't answer beyond a grin as he watched his mate open the bag and laugh as he pulled out a small box of chocolate-covered caramels.

“They're ruby chocolates, they were handing out these as samples at the sweets shop,” Harry explained. “I thought you might like to try them.”

“Oh, I do love ruby chocolate,” Remus said with a smile. “I would call it my favourite, were it not so damnably expensive.” He paused and moved in to peck Harry on the lips lightly.

“Thank you, Harry.”

“I have something for Teddy too,” Harry added, “but I figured he'd ruin his appetite, so I thought I'd give it to him after dinner?”

“Spoken like a *true* parent,” Remus offered with a warm chuckle that made Harry flush. “Your mother would be very proud.”

“My...” Harry trailed off a little, and smiled up at his husband—his *mate*. “What d'you think they'd say...y'know, about all this? Or...what would Sirius say?”

“Well, I think your dad and Sirius would have some choice words for me if I ever mistreated you,” Remus replied with a warm chuckle, though there was an evasiveness in his tone that made Harry a little uneasy. While he didn't think Remus was lying, he got the distinct impression that he wasn't telling Harry everything. “Your mother...she was muggle-born, as you know. I feel as though she may not have understood at first, and after it was all explained, likely she would have protested the Ministry's archaic laws concerning omegas quite vehemently. I can *guarantee* that there would have been leaflets, buttons, and protests.” Harry laughed, thinking of Hermione's *spew* efforts, and Remus smiled before he continued.

“I think, in the end, she, like your father and Sirius, would want you to be happy, no matter who it was with, and I like to think they'd trust me with that happiness, regardless of our *slight* age gap.”

“I know I trust you with it,” Harry offered, setting his bag with Teddy's chocolates aside before he moved closer to Remus, and laughed a little when his baby bump got in the way.

Remus smiled, and laid both his hands on Harry's stomach, earning them a soft gurgle of movement, as though the baby was pleased by the attention of their father.

~*~

Dinner was a pleasant affair, and Teddy ate politely enough, despite the boy doing all that he could to avoid eating his greens. However, Harry's promise that he *might* have a special treat for Teddy if he finished his sprouts earned the parents the response they'd been hoping for, and Teddy choked down the boiled vegetable, albeit not without much complaining and moaning over the taste of it.

That all changed however when Harry presented Teddy with the little box of chocolate caramels, almost the same ones he'd given to Remus, but with milk chocolate on the outside instead of the ruby chocolate.

"I hope you did not spoil us, and get nothing for yourself?" Remus asked when he noticed that Harry had not pulled out any caramels for himself. Harry grinned, and revealed a bar of solid dark chocolate, which made Remus relax into another smile.

The rest of the evening progressed in much the same way. Remus played with Teddy while Harry cleared up from their meal, and then Remus prepared a tea platter for them, which they nursed while they watched Teddy play, and both adults got on the floor when the boy requested that they play Gobstones with him.

It was a sort of peace that Harry had been longing for ever since he started school, the home he'd always wanted, with the love and care that only a family could provide.

On the pretence of needing the toilet, Harry stepped away to dry his joyous tears.

Once Teddy had been put to bed, the sweet, pleasant atmosphere seemed to shift slightly to something decidedly more sexual. Remus drew Harry close, and their lips touched in a familiar intoxicating kiss that left Harry's knees feeling weak, and his mind lost in a pleasant fog.

"What do you think of making it an early night, hmm?" Remus asked softly against Harry's mouth. "I have been positively *dying* to taste you since you came home. I want to *cover* you in my scent, my omega."

"Oh, you've been so deliciously randy ever since things calmed down, maybe even a little bit before then," Harry purred, grinning as he leant in for one of Remus's sweet kisses. "Want to remind the world who I belong to, eh?"

Remus let out the softest growl of affirmation, and Harry grinned.

Without responding properly, Remus swept Harry into his arms. The omega yelped and laughed as he looped his arms around his alpha's neck, and Remus carried him up the stairs and towards their bedroom with almost comical haste.

"Don't you *dare* drop us," Harry whispered, and Remus beamed at Harry's use of *us*, as though reminding the alpha that there was a baby on board.

"I won't," Remus promised, his voice a soft, reassuring whisper as they bypassed Teddy's room. "I'll always catch you, Harry."

"I know, love," Harry replied, smiling as they at last made it to their room, and Remus set him down gently before he waved his wand, casting the necessary silencing charms and alerts, should Teddy toddle out of bed from a nightmare.

Harry watched and waited, his entire body seeming to hum with anticipation as he watched Remus work. Once he set aside his wand upon the nightstand, Harry shuffled up to the head of the bed just as Remus joined him, blanketing his omega with his body as he drew Harry into a kiss.

“Shall I ask your permission, Harry, for posterity's sake?” Remus teased, and Harry huffed a laugh.

“You mean you can't just *look* at me and tell how much I want it?” Harry teased, which earned him another chuckle as Remus bowed forward to trail his nose along Harry's bonding mark, making him shiver.

“I don't need to,” Remus replied, whispering the words against his skin. “I can *smell* it.”

“Hmm, then I *must* want it,” Harry said, reaching up to tease the buttons on Remus's shirt, which made his alpha smile.

As was their new ritual, Remus shed his clothing first, doffing the garments hastily and without fanfare. Any attempt to *put on a show* for Harry had led to a number of unpleasant flashbacks, and both of them quickly learnt that it may take more time for Harry's mind to fully heal from his experience at Lucius's hands.

Once he was undressed, Harry was only given the briefest of moments to bask in the glorious sight of his mate before he bowed forward to help Harry undress, never once glancing at him while they removed his clothing, which caused Harry's stomach to stir with an unpleasant sort of guilt. He wished he could *let* Remus look at him, and enjoy this act of revealing himself to his mate, but after what Lucius did, it was still difficult for Harry to do so.

“Don't feel guilty, my love,” Remus murmured as though he had sensed Harry's emotions, and he pressed a soft kiss to Harry's lips. “It's all right. There is nothing wrong with rushing out of our clothing.”

“Okay,” Harry agreed readily, and he flushed at how soft and needy he sounded. In response, Remus merely chuckled as he moved in to kiss Harry again. One hand was pressed gently but firmly into the swell of Harry's stomach, which immediately made the baby shift, as though they were reaching for their father.

Harry rested a hand over Remus's as he drew out the kiss, a needy moan slipping past his lips. Remus answered it with his own grunt of need, his hips gyrating his sizeable girth into Harry's thigh, leaving a sticky trail in its wake.

“N-Need it...” Harry breathed in between kisses, drawing Remus's attention effectively away from the baby. Harry arched his hips weakly, and Remus smiled as he nipped at the omega's bottom lip before he leant in for another kiss.

“And I'll give it to you, love,” he replied softly, his voice almost a purr that made Harry groan again.

Harry spread his legs in invitation, his arse leaking with a thin trail of slick. Remus breathed out a soft, shuddering breath, as though he was momentarily taken aback by Harry's express consent. Thankfully, he had long since gotten past constantly asking Harry *if he was sure*, and did not speak on it as he pressed one last kiss to Harry's lips before he gently coaxed him onto his side.

Harry rolled willingly with Remus's wordless instruction. He drew one leg to his chest (more or less, given that his stomach was somewhat in the way), exposing himself, and he heard Remus sigh again, as though Harry's actions were in some way monumental, and not something they had done dozens of times before.

Harry shivered as he felt his alpha's lips brush along his spine while his fingers teased his opening, slick and aching for Remus. Harry let out a soft whine of need, and he shuddered as he felt Remus's fingers breach him, stretching and preparing him gently, lovingly.

"Please..." Harry whispered, his eyes shut, and he let out a soft sigh of contentment when he felt Remus shift in order to kiss his shoulder, his fingers still deeply embedded in his arse.

"Please what, Harry?" Remus purred in his ear, and Harry huffed a laugh.

"Don't start, you prat," Harry muttered. "You know exactly *what*."

Remus answered with another kiss against his shoulder as he retracted his fingers, and replaced them with the head of his cock.

Harry arched his neck with a soft moan, the back of his head landing against Remus's shoulder. Remus pressed a kiss to Harry's bonding mark, making him tremble, all the while he eased deeper into his omega, but not once did Harry feel any kind of pain—only pleasure.

"That's it, my Harry, my omega," Remus whispered, rotating his hips as he pressed deeper, and Harry keened, his bottom lip caught between his teeth. Remus ran his hands over him gently, mapping Harry's body with his fingers, and continued to whisper sweet encouragements into his ear.

Remus moved with him, keeping one hand over Harry's knee, the appendage held gently, but firmly against the omega's rounded stomach. From this position, Remus could not move as fast, but that didn't matter to Harry—they weren't just *shagging*—they were making *love*.

"*Remus...*" Harry moaned, and his alpha pressed a kiss to his shoulder in silent reassurance.

"Does it feel good, Harry?" Remus breathed, and Harry nodded incrementally. There were no words for how it felt. It was almost as though a simple *yes* would not completely encapsulate what Harry was feeling. He was so full—of emotion, of pleasure, of *love*.

Harry was certain he could never grow tired of the way Remus made him feel.

"G-Getting close..." Harry breathed, and Remus answered with another kiss to his shoulder. He turned Harry just slightly, the edge of his belly pressing into the duvet, enabling Remus to

drive into him faster, deeper, one hand at his hip while the other moved down to his aching cock.

Harry moaned his assent, spurred closer to orgasm by the growing ridge of Remus's knot hitting his rim, and the hand on his cock. It was all too much, and with a final cry, Harry came, while Remus pounded into him several more times before he found his own release with a soft snarl, his cock locking in place in Harry's arse as the omega was pumped full of cum.

The pair lay on their sides, panting and unmoving. Harry felt as though every muscle in his body had been massaged into oblivion, and he wasn't certain he'd be able to move, even if he wanted to.

Remus took care of this, as he always did, reaching for his wand in order to cast the necessary cleaning charms, all without pulling too much on his knot, which was still keeping them tied together.

Once Remus had deemed them sufficiently clean, he flicked his wand a few more times, clearing the stench of sex from the room and opening the window a fraction, letting in both fresh air and the smell of rain, though whatever charms Remus had on the house stopped the weather from seeping into their room and getting them wet.

At last, Remus set down his wand and wrapped an arm around Harry's waist, his hand resting upon his belly, the act both possessive and protective. Harry shivered as Remus rubbed his thumb in slow, purposeful circles against his stomach, earning them both another flutter of movement.

"The baby really likes you," Harry breathed, and Remus smiled at him sadly.

"I never got to do things like this with...with Teddy," Remus explained timidly, as though he was afraid of upsetting Harry by mentioning Tonks. "I was away so much during the war, I could only stop in for brief visits. I always felt so guilty about everything, it was hard to stop and enjoy it—enjoy my time with her, er—*them*."

"I can't say I understand it, but there was a war on," Harry said softly, reaching out for Remus, and he squeezed his hand in gentle reassurance. "We all did things we didn't want to during the war, and I'm sure Tonks understood that better than most. She loved you, and you loved her, and you love Teddy *so* much. I don't think you need to feel guilty with so much love in you."

Remus answered Harry's statement with a sad sort of smile as he leant in to kiss Harry's shoulder, the act giving him the impression that he wanted to kiss Harry properly, but from their current position he couldn't quite manage it. Harry smiled, and reached back to cradle Remus's cheek, and wordlessly he wiped away Remus's tears.

Birthday

Chapter Notes

A/N: Next update is scheduled for August 27th. Enjoy! :)

Chapter Twenty-Two – Birthday

When Harry woke on the morning of his birthday, it was to a sweet, warm kiss that made his mind go foggy and his toes curl.

“Mmm, stop,” Harry whined halfheartedly as Remus ran a hand down his side, and cradled the omega's growing belly reverently. “I probably have morning breath...”

“Oh most definitely,” Remus murmured as his hand slid back up to touch the omega's cheek. “Tastes like a corpse, but somehow I am finding it remarkably easy to persevere...”

“Hmm, well your breath is...actually, not that awful,” Harry remarked, pulling back a little to grin at him. “What, did you sneak off to brush your teeth just so that you could snog me until I woke up?”

“Breath-Freshening Charm,” Remus filled in with a wry smirk. “I couldn't fathom actually getting up that early.”

“Is that some sort of code for not wishing to inadvertently wake Teddy up?” Harry teased, which caused Remus to chuckle warmly.

“You know me entirely too well, Harry.”

~*~

“*Happy Birthday, Other Daddy!*” Teddy shrieked, barrelling into the bedroom with a breakfast platter held high over his head, and yet somehow he managed to not spill anything.

Harry laughed as the boy toddled over, and set the platter down across Harry's blanket-covered thighs, displaying a truly frightful kid-made breakfast—milky hot water in a tea cup (missing the teabags), slightly blackened scrambled eggs with what looked like chocolate chips in it and more than a few bits of eggshell, and charred toast slathered in far too much

butter, topped off with enormous globs of what looked like an entire jar of marmalade. “I maded this all by myself!”

“Wow!” Harry said, his voice cracking a little as he gazed down at the mess of a breakfast. “Your daddy didn't help you at all?”

“Nope!” Teddy grinned a broad, sunshine grin. “Daddy said I had to use special stuff to make it, but that's it.”

“Special stuff?” Harry asked as he shifted his gaze to Remus, who reached up to scratch the back of his neck sheepishly.

“Particular types of pans I have, they're imbued with Anti-Burn Charmwork that only heats food, not hands. They're highly recommended for cooking with children. I thought Teddy could use them for making you breakfast, seeing how he was so set on doing so.”

“And I got *no* owies, Other Daddy,” Teddy said, still smiling as he held out his hands, which were sticky with chocolate, marmalade, and other things that Harry wasn't overly keen to identify, but clear of any injury.

“That's amazing, Ted,” Harry said, smiling at the boy, whose grin broadened at Harry's praise. “You did a great job.”

“Well, Harry,” Remus said as he slipped from the bed and grabbed his dressing gown, “I believe I need to go and investigate the kitchen to ensure that Teddy remembered to turn off the cooker. You can start in on that breakfast.” He paused as he leant in to peck Harry's cheek, and whispered, “and I will be sure to bring you up some heartburn potion.”

“You're a *saint*,” Harry said in reply, grinning as he turned his head to offer Remus a proper kiss, before he reluctantly watched his husband sweep from the room.

Once he was gone, Harry shifted his gaze back to the platter of food before him. He took a breath to brace himself, and then began to eat.

~*~

As it would turn out, the heartburn potion would be deeply needed after Harry had gagged down the breakfast, doing his level best to not let on to Teddy how bad it really was.

Remus, to his credit, slipped Harry a tall glass of ice water and some regular toast in order to wash Teddy's masterpiece down along with the promised heartburn potion. It certainly aided in getting the gritty feeling of burnt toast and egg shell bits out of his mouth, for which he was deeply grateful.

“Bless you for being practically perfect,” Harry said with a little sigh after he'd downed his potion, which made him feel much better. “I think you need to let Teddy help in the mornings

more often, just so he works out how to make breakfast food properly, you know?"

"Perhaps we'll have him improve by *my* birthday," Remus teased, and Harry barked a laugh.

"Oh, so that's your master plan, is it? Have Teddy poison me, but not you?" Harry demanded half in jest while he grinned at Remus, who chuckled warmly in response.

"Naturally," Remus replied, sweeping in for a kiss before he moved towards the bedroom door, stopping at the threshold to add, "a few owls may have dropped off some gifts for you downstairs, if you want to get dressed sometime today and come see what they brought."

Harry laughed again, shaking his head, but offered up no proper response to Remus as he watched his husband head down to tend to Teddy. Harry gathered up some clothing for the day, and moved to the bathroom for a shower.

~*~

As promised, there was a small pile of gifts waiting for Harry on the coffee table when he got downstairs. It included sweets from Ron, child care and baby-naming books from Hermione, a gift basket from Molly and Arthur that included bath oils, scented candles, lotion for dealing with stretch marks, and fancy chocolate bon-bons. Paired with was a note that read,

It is not so effeminate to treat yourself when one is with child, Harry. Do not be embarrassed to use these items. Having children can be wonderful, but it is also quite exhausting. Be sure to take care of yourself.

Happy Birthday!

Love,

Molly and Arthur

The note made Harry laugh, wondering how Molly could have known that he'd feel a little odd about using scented candles and bath oils, but he had to admit that she had a point. Just being pregnant in itself was tiring, and if it Teddy was any indication, things would be positively *barmy* when the baby was finally born.

After Molly and Arthur came a rough patchwork blanket from Hagrid, as well as his rock cakes. Harry was quick to set aside the latter, rather than further abuse his stomach that day, and instead took his time to admire the blanket.

It was clearly designed for a baby, made of a mismatched selection of fabrics that all clashed horribly. The cut squares were all *just* the wrong size, making it look uneven, and the edges were frayed, none of it bearing the careful hand of Molly's knitted works.

And yet, the sight of it brought tears to Harry's eyes before he could stop himself.

“Oh, oh f-fuc...dge,” Harry corrected himself, laughing as he used the edge of the blanket to dab under his glasses, while Teddy looked on with panicked concern, and Remus merely slid a reassuring arm around Harry's shoulders, allowing him to cry.

“It's all right, son,” Remus said as he shifted again in order to rub Harry's back gently while Harry tried to calm himself down, and patted Teddy once on the head reassuringly. “He's not sad, he's happy.”

“Are you *sure*, Daddy?” Teddy asked, sounding thoroughly unconvinced as he crawled across the sofa where they had all seated themselves for Harry's gift-opening, and he slotted himself into Harry's lap. He offered his adoptive father a big hug as he said, “it's okay, Other Daddy. No more sads. Are you sad because the blankie is really ugly?”

Harry snorted, the question effectively chasing his tears away, and he moved to pull his son into a tighter hug, and he felt the boy smile against his cheek.

“No, Ted, I'm not sad, really. I'm happy. This blanket was made by the first real friend I ever made, Hagrid. Even though it's a little...er...*whimsical*, I really love it. It means a lot that he'd make something for the baby. I like it a lot.”

“You like weird things, Other Daddy.”

“That explains why I like *you* so much,” Harry teased as he tapped the boy's button nose, which made him let out a shrill, happy giggle.

~*~

After the emotional and stomach-wrenching morning, the little family went out to Hogsmeade for a day of shopping and sight-seeing. Teddy seemed to particularly enjoy Honeydukes', and Harry had caved with very little pressure from his son, buying him an enormous slab of milk chocolate that was likely to last him until Christmas.

Harry enjoyed checking out the new Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes shop that had recently opened in Hogsmeade, though without George or Lee present something seemed to be lacking in it, and it did not carry the same whimsy as their Diagon Alley location. Remus wanted to stop and see the Shrieking Shack, though when Harry hesitantly asked why, Remus merely responded, “memories.”

Harry thought it best not to press Remus for more information on that particular topic, instead letting him keep his thoughts to himself.

They met up with Ron and Hermione for lunch, choosing one of the newer, more family-oriented restaurants which served, of all things—hamburgers.

Harry thought it was brilliant, while Hermione complained that it was tacky. Harry thought that her lesser view of the establishment was likely due to the fact that it had clearly been styled in an attempt to mimic a muggle-style burger bar, complete with plastic seats and the pervading smell of fried food that seemed to cling to everything.

“Really, Harry?” Hermione complained as they stood in line to place their orders, with Teddy perched happily on Remus's shoulders, his head swivelling like an owl's as he tried to look at everything all at once. “*This* is where you want to spend your birthday? Not somewhere more...classy?”

“What's classier than burgers and chips?” Ron demanded as he looked over the brightly lit sign that displayed the menu items. “And they have fancy things...look! Choking Cola! That sounds like a cocktail to me.”

“*Coca Cola*,” Hermione corrected as she rolled her eyes, clearly having not informed Ron that there would be fizzy drinks available.

The quintet placed their orders, with Ron and Hermione selecting more tame options of regular burgers, chips, and a soft drink each. Harry opted for something called a *Tex Mex Cheese-Stuffed Burger with Bacon*, paired with chips, of course. Remus requested a kids' meal for Teddy, and a steak sandwich for himself, while sheepishly asking the girl at the register if it was at all possible to make it as rare as possible.

“Er, how rare, sir?” she asked curiously, blinking up at him owlishly, as though she'd never heard of such a request before.

“So rare that you can practically hear it mooing,” Remus replied, his tone dry, and Harry huffed a soft laugh as he wrapped an arm around his partner, who immediately relaxed when he felt Harry's hands on him.

“I'll see what I can do, sir,” she replied, offering him a courteous smile, and he nodded his thanks, the group stepping to the end of the counter to await their meal.

The meal, in spite of Hermione's protests, was a delight, in particular when Ron sipped his drink, and jumped back in alarm as he shouted, “it's got bubbles in it!”

Introducing Ron to soft drinks was certainly a high point, and Hermione even seemed amused by his reaction. She seemed to be trying to hide it behind a slight scowl however, as though she thought Harry deserved something more than burgers on his birthday.

“Don't worry, Hermione,” Harry replied while Remus escorted Teddy to the toilets a little bit later. “I have it on good authority that my wonderful husband has something romantic planned for the evening. I don't know what it is exactly, but I *do* know that it involves letting Teddy spend the night with his gran, so—”

“—birthday shag,” Ron interrupted, grinning, and Hermione rolled her eyes as she elbowed her boyfriend sharply.

“*Please*, Ron, not *everything* is about shagging—”

“—if it's not about shagging I'll be a little disappointed,” Harry filled in, making Hermione scoff. “If I'm lucky, I'll be walking funny for *days*—”

“Oh, really, Harry!” Hermione protested hotly, “is that *all* you boys think about?”

Ron and Harry exchanged an uncertain look, and Hermione let out another indignant sputter when they were silent for too long, which caused them both to start laughing.

The remainder of the meal went well enough when Teddy and Remus returned from the toilets, just as Harry and Ron's laughter had died out. Teddy was particularly enthralled by his kids' meal toy, a little Swedish Short-Snout dragon that stomped around the table, huffing sparks at everyone. Remus smiled endearingly at his son, and Harry, in turn, could not tear his eyes from both of them, which made Hermione oddly teary-eyed, while Ron appeared slightly put-off by Harry's fixation upon his family, though it was unclear if this was due to his discomfort with grand displays of emotion, or something else entirely.

At the end of it, Harry was careful to thank both of his friends for coming, and he made certain to include thanks for the gifts he'd gotten that morning. Immediately, both of them waved off as though it was nothing.

“Really, Harry,” Hermione said as she hugged him, “you're our *best friend*. We're always happy to spoil you a little on your birthday.”

“She's right, mate,” Ron added as he reached out to clap Harry on the shoulder. “Enjoy your birthday, don't get all caught up in feeling weird about getting presents from us.”

“I'll do my best,” Harry replied, laughing a little, and with one last goodbye, he turned to grin at Teddy. “Ready to get going, little man?”

“Are we going to Gran's now?” Teddy asked excitedly, and Harry laughed again as he reached out to ruffle his hair.

“Soon, son,” Harry replied, and grinned when both of his friends seemed to get a little emotional at that.

The little family headed home, Teddy to 'pack' for his overnight visit to his grandmother's house, Remus to 'work', and Harry to have a short rest.

Harry watched his family take off in opposite directions as he eased down on the sofa, letting out a soft groan as his hands fell to his rounded stomach. Despite it being a few months yet until the baby was born, Harry still got tired if he was on his feet for too long, and he was enjoying the prospect of a rest before his fun day of birthday stuff continued.

Be good to yourself, his mind healer always told him, be selfish. The world doesn't rest on your shoulders anymore. Making yourself your top priority is never a selfish act, in particular when one is with child.

In that, Harry was inclined to agree. Especially when time to himself was always so brief with a four-year-old to keep in check. Harry knew that before they went out again, he would have to help Teddy re-pack his rucksack, replacing at least a few of the toys with actual clothing.

Harry didn't mind, he loved spending time with little Teddy, but it was also *exhausting*.

Harry let out a little sigh, conjuring himself a cup of tea while he listened to Remus putter about in the kitchen, obviously *not* working, despite his claim to the contrary. Harry chuckled to himself, listening to his husband do whatever it was he needed to do in preparation for the evening ahead, content, for once, to not sneak in and see what he was up to. Though Harry had teasingly tried to wrest the alpha's plans out of him more than once in the past week, Harry had no true desire to actually ruin Remus's plans, whatever they happened to be.

Instead, Harry sipped his tea, and relaxed into the sofa's cushions with a soft sigh of contentment.

~*~

A couple of hours later, after the hamburgers had been well and truly digested, Remus announced that it was time to go. True to form, Harry had indeed needed to repack Teddy's rucksack, exchanging a number of the toys the boy had crammed into it for actual clothes, as well as a toothbrush and pyjamas, though the boy did not appear overly dismayed at this. Instead, he merely babbled away happily at all the things he planned to do with his grandmother, a testament to how much better he was getting at being away from Harry for a little bit here and there.

Harry smiled as he finished with the rucksack, handing it to Teddy before he laid one hand on the boy's shoulder, and the other on his rotund stomach. He guided Teddy back to the sitting room where his father was waiting by the fire, and upon seeing Remus, the boy's expression seemed to brighten with joy.

“Ready to go, son?” Remus asked, and Teddy grinned at him brightly.

“Yes, Daddy!” he cried, making Remus chortle warmly as the boy scampered over, and reached up for the little pot of Floo powder in his father's hand.

Harry watched Remus escort Teddy through the Floo Network, and his hands fell instinctively on his stomach, running his hand across the bump as he waited for Remus to reappear. In the same breath, he felt a soft but distinct gurgle of movement, and he chuckled a little.

“Don't worry, baby,” Harry murmured to his stomach, “Daddy will be home soon.”

As though on cue, Remus stepped back out of the fireplace, and without even pausing to clean the soot off himself, he swept in to offer Harry a warm kiss in greeting.

“Ready to go, love?” he purred, and Harry let out a soft groan of longing at Remus's almost sultry tone.

“Am I going to finally find out what you've been up to?” Harry asked teasingly, and Remus smiled in answer.

“Perhaps,” Remus replied, pausing just long enough to use his wand to dispel himself of soot before he extended an arm to Harry in invitation. Harry smiled, leaning into the proffered embrace happily, while Remus led him to the door. “Do you have any ideas on where we're headed?”

“Hmm...” Harry intoned as they stepped out of the front door, and began to walk, “well...you haven't asked me to change so I guess we're not going somewhere posh—thanks for that, by the way, maternity dress robes are *hideous*. And we're going outside, so either you plan for us to walk to wherever you want to go, or we're Apparating somewhere, which leaves me with about a *million* options, but I heard you in the kitchen earlier, so maybe it has something to do with food—oh.”

Remus had led them out of the house and around the back. Teddy's toys had all been cleared away, and in the midst of the flowerbeds and vegetable patches was a large square blanket that had been adorned with bowls and platters of food. The blanket itself had been surrounded with rose petals, like something out of a romance novel, and yet Harry could not find it in himself to feel silly at the sweet display before him.

“Happy Birthday, Harry,” Remus whispered, leaning in to press a gentle kiss to Harry's cheek. “What do you think?”

“I think it's brilliant,” Harry whispered back, his smile broadening a little when Remus chuckled warmly. “How did you manage to keep Teddy from spilling the beans?”

“Easily, I didn't tell him anything,” Remus replied as he guided Harry forward, and helped him to sit down on one side of the red and white chequered blanket, and proceeded to pour them each some carbonated water in lieu of champagne, while Harry laughed at the explanation. “Goodness knows I love our son, but he is *the worst* at keeping secrets. I just told him I had a special night planned, and he asked me if I planned to kiss you a lot.”

“Good call on that,” Harry said, chuckling as he sipped the drink from the champagne flute, while Remus began to fill their plates with roasted chicken, roasted potatoes, and salad. “I suppose he was thinking of that time he *almost* walked in on us, and we were faced with the daunting prospect of explaining sex to a four-year-old?”

“That'd be my guess,” Remus replied, laughing with Harry as he offered up one of the plates to him. “Tuck in, love.”

As with all of Remus's cooking, everything was delicious. The lettuce leaves were crisp as though they'd been freshly picked, the chicken was succulent and sweet, sticky with a glaze of fresh honey right off the comb, while the potatoes were golden and delicious. Harry felt no shame whatsoever in asking for seconds and thirds, which made Remus brim with pride, and even his scent seemed to shift slightly to something that reflected how proud he was that he'd managed to please his mate.

As the sun began to set, Remus lit a few candles around the edges of their blanket, suffusing them in a soft, comforting glow before Remus brought out a small chocolate cake for them to share. It was significantly smaller than the cake they'd had at Teddy's party, but even so they made sure to save Teddy a large slice, which they put aside in order to save themselves from temptation of eating it themselves.

“Teddy asked that I give you his present after we had your birthday dinner,” Remus said as they sipped their after-dinner tea, and Harry smiled bashfully as Remus Summoned two parcels from the house—one was a tiny box, carefully wrapped, and the other was a scroll of parchment sealed with red and gold ribbon, tied with at least half a dozen tight, lumpy knots, though thankfully the parchment was not crushed by Teddy's exuberant knot-tying.

Remus handed Harry the parchment first, and Harry slid off the ribbon before he unrolled it, and his breath caught.

It was a crayon drawing. The artist was most assuredly Teddy, with stick figures of Harry, Remus, Teddy, and a tiny bundle in Harry's stick-figure arms that seemed to be the baby. Below it, in a shaky unpractised hand were the words, *I love my family*.

Like the morning with Hagrid's baby blanket, Harry felt his throat grow tight at the sight of the drawing in his hands. He laughed as he wiped his eyes, mumbling about *bloody hormones*, which caused Remus to chuckle softly as he patiently waited for Harry to collect himself.

“Okay, I think I'm good,” Harry said with a weak laugh a few moments later, and Remus smiled a little.

“If you're certain...” Remus began, but trailed off with a chuckle when he spotted the scowl that crossed Harry's face. Instead, he held out the second small gift in his hands. “This is from me. I'll explain it after you open it.”

Blinking bemusedly, Harry accepted the small box from his mate. It was square, a little smaller than a plum, and light. When he shook it, he couldn't hear anything from within, which did not help in figuring out what might actually be held inside the box.

Harry ripped off the simple red paper, and found a little box inside, its exterior covered in black velvet, and the back of it bore two little hinges.

I know what this is, Harry realized, just as he said aloud, “oh, bloody hell, you *didn't*.”

Remus smiled enigmatically, but did not respond, pointedly waiting for Harry to finish opening the gift.

Heart pounding, Harry flicked the little box open. Inside was a white-gold band inset with a thin line of turquoise that ran around the centre of the ring. When Harry looked up, his eyes shiny with tears yet again, he spotted the same ring on Remus's left hand, glimmering softly in the candlelight.

“We didn't have the best start, Harry,” Remus murmured as he shifted closer, resting his hands over Harry's lovingly, while he stared into Harry's eyes. “We were pushed together out of necessity so that I could protect you from Lucius, and neither of us entered into this intending to find love. It took me far too long to realize how much I truly love you.

“Harry, what I feel for you is not pheromones, or hormones, or any outside source making me feel this way—I know in my heart of hearts that what I feel for you is real. We have been mated for months, and yet despite this, we never had a ceremony, nor exchanged rings. I know you are not interested in a wedding, and so I thought I should at least rectify the latter.”

Uncertain if he was up to speaking, overwhelmed with emotion at the gesture, Harry could only nod, laughing and wiping his eyes as Remus offered him an adoring smile.

Apparently sensing that he was too overwhelmed to do it himself, Remus lifted the ring from its bed, and slid it carefully into place upon Harry's finger. The piece of jewellery shifted its size to accommodate the limb, while Harry moved in to kiss his husband, and hug him close.

At the same moment that Harry went in for another kiss, and perhaps more, out of the darkness swooped a tawny owl.

It dropped an envelope with an official-looking *Ministry of Magic* seal upon Harry's lap, and without pause it swept back into the air, flying back the way it had come.

Harry jolted back a little, startled by the owl's appearance, and gazed from the letter to Remus uncertainly, while his alpha nodded at him to open it.

Grumbling at the owl's horrific timing, Harry slit the envelope extracted the parchment.

One look at its contents caused Harry to let out a soft curse. Remus surreptitiously leant in in order to read the letter over Harry's shoulder.

Dear Mr Potter,

We are contacting you to inform you of your required presence at the Ministry of Magic for the hearing of Lucius Malfoy on 20th October at 10 o'clock in the morning, in Courtroom Eight.

Please be prepared to provide memory evidence for the accused on-site. Memories acquired in advance will not be accepted.

A wheelchair will be available on-site should you have need of it, a courtesy offered to all Ministry Visitors who may otherwise be indisposed.

Please have your alpha confirm your attendance by return owl, no later than 15th September.

Hecuba Trice

Barrister Office for the Prosecution

Trials

Chapter Notes

A/N: Next update is scheduled for September 10th. Enjoy!

Content Warning: Anxiety, Birth Complications

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Chapter Twenty-Three – Trials

Harry told himself as often as he could that he had *plenty* of time until Lucius's hearing. It was just over two and a half months until the day in question, after all, or nearly twelve weeks.

That was, in Harry's estimation, plenty of time to prepare himself to see Lucius again.

During the days and weeks that followed, Remus reminded Harry to the point of annoyance of all the important things. Lucius would have no wand, he'd be guarded by Aurors, and there would be a binding spell in place to stop him from using his Voice on Harry.

Harry knew all that, and yet after what he had been through he couldn't quite swallow his terror at the idea of seeing Lucius Malfoy again.

Robert, Harry's mind healer, spent their subsequent sessions after the arrival of the letter reminding Harry of the same, as did Madam Pomfrey during his check-ups. Both his mind healer and general healer repeated what Remus's reassurances, and Robert made a point of digging into why Harry was petrified of seeing Lucius again, and helping him see that there was nothing to fear.

Privately, Harry thought it was fairly obvious *why* he was so freaked out, but no one was really interested in that. Instead, all anyone seemed to want to do was make Harry feel well enough to face Lucius again, and at last have him put away forever.

Harry needed to do it, that much he knew.

But despite his past triumphs in the face of adversity, he was no longer certain if he *could*.

A gentle prodding against Harry's forehead woke him up on the day before the trial.

Harry rolled over as best he could, what with his nearly seven-month belly in the way, expecting a kiss, but instead he found Teddy kneeling upon the bed next to him, and watching Harry with bright, concerned eyes.

"Morning, bud," Harry rasped as he reached up to rub his eyes. "Where's your daddy?"

"Making breakfast," Teddy replied with a little smile. "Daddy said I needed to come wake you up before you have too many sleeps, and he promises that he made *lots* of extra, but...can I say hi to my baby brother first?"

"Course you can," Harry said, smiling as he sat up, yawning, and rolled up his T-shirt so that Teddy could rub his stomach, perhaps a little harder than was necessary as he beamed at Harry's rotund belly.

"Good morning, Baby!" he chirped. "Other Daddy is awake now, so you can has foods soon. I'm sorry you have nothing to play with, I'll talk to Other Daddy again—"

"—Ted, you know I love you, but I am *not* swallowing any toys for the baby," Harry interrupted, careful to keep the bite of annoyance out of his tone while he smiled at his son. "We've been over this. The baby isn't ready to come out for a while yet, and even though they move around some, they're mostly sleeping. They'll even do a lot of that after they're born, so it'll be some time before they'll be able to play with you how you want."

"Oh." Teddy frowned, poking his lip out, and Harry smiled weakly as he reached out to ruffle Teddy's hair affectionately.

"Hey, don't be sad, son, I don't mean the baby doesn't *want* to play with you, they're still just a bit too little," Harry explained, and his words seemed to soften the boy's expression, but didn't completely wipe it away. "Tell you what—it'll just be you and me today since your daddy has to go into Diagon and discuss book stuff with the people at Flourish and Blotts. Why don't we see if Leigh can come over, and we'll do a trip to the park, and I'll make something fun for lunch. How does that sound?"

"*Cheese!*" Teddy cried excitedly, and Harry laughed as he watched the boy race out of the room to tell his father the good news.

Still chuckling, Harry at last rolled himself out of bed. He headed to the toilet for his morning pee break, sitting down for the act, given that he couldn't see his cock very well over his pregnant belly.

After he finished, Harry waddled back to the master bedroom and used a cleaning charm to wash himself, as it was much preferred to standing in the shower and being unable to reach

certain areas. Though he loved Remus, there was something oddly mortifying about having to ask his husband to help him wash those hard-to-reach areas.

Harry then took his time sifting through his clothes until he found something that would fit—jeans with a stretchy waistband, and one of Dudley's old T-shirts. Harry finished it off with a fuzzy pair of socks, then shuffled down to the kitchen, where Remus was doling out plates of eggs (fried sunny side up, and as runny as he was willing to allow Harry to have them), fried cherry tomatoes, and plenty of toast.

Harry drank glass after glass of orange juice in lieu of pumpkin juice that morning, which he knew he'd regret when he'd have to go running to the toilet a few hundred times afterwards. The massively runny eggs had been cooked perfectly, and Harry enjoyed the act of splitting the yolk and sopping the result with his toast, while Teddy continued to chatter with his father, alternating between his plans for the day, and how Harry had once more refused to swallow any of his toys for the baby.

“Maybe I should stay home today,” Remus mused worriedly as Teddy's explanations tapered out, and he eyed Harry uncertainly. “I mean...the last few weeks have been rough on you, and Madam Pomfrey advised you rest—”

“Love, nausea and dizzy spells don't mean there's something wrong with the baby,” Harry grouched, shooting his husband a glare. “I'm *fine*. I'm as big as a house, but I'm *fine*. You need to go to Diagon Alley today, I'll not have you risk losing out on Back-to-School profits just because you're a worse mother hen than Molly. If you're really so worried, I won't take Teddy and Leigh to the park, they can play here. I know things are a little stressful right now, but you can't spend all your time worrying about me.”

“Harry, it's my *job* to worry about you, especially right now, with all that's going on...”

“And you do it *excellently*,” Harry replied with an amused smirk. “So much so that if you *don't* go to Diagon today, I will actually kill you.”

“Other Daddy, if you kill Daddy, can I have his room?” Teddy interjected, making Remus jump a little, almost as though he'd forgotten his son was present.

“You can have his half if he doesn't get his backside in the Floo by ten o'clock,” Harry replied sweetly, and Teddy's mouth fell open in shock at Harry's language, even as Remus began to laugh.

~*~

Harry managed to convince Teddy to go play after breakfast, after which he took to making sure that Remus didn't dawdle on clearing up, which was a bad habit of his. Instead, Harry shunted his husband off to the bedroom in order to give himself enough time to get into a

suitable set of robes for his meeting at Flourish and Blotts while Harry finished the clean-up, pointedly ignoring Remus's myriad of protests.

"Please, Harry, try to take it easy today," Remus said later as they stood together before the fireplace while he cradled Harry's cheeks in his hands. "I don't like all these dizzy spells you've been having lately, and I don't want something to happen when only Teddy is here."

"I'll be fine, love, I promise," Harry replied, smiling as he got on his toes to offer Remus a kiss. "Both Robert and Pomfrey don't think it's from the baby, anyway. They keep saying it's anxiety from the upcoming trial. Pomfrey says the same thing with those heart palpitations I keep having too."

"Well, regardless, I want you to rest," Remus said softly, but firmly. "Tomorrow will be hard, I know that, but Lucius will not be able to get to you, and I will be with you the entire time, even when you testify. Lucius will not be able to touch you. Just remember that."

"I know, love," Harry said, smiling as he kissed Remus again. "Now, go on. Go and be brilliant."

Remus smiled weakly, but opened his mouth as though to offer up another protest. In response, Harry shoved his shoulder a little, pulling a laugh from his alpha before he kissed Harry one last time, and disappeared into the Floo.

Staying on his feet for a few minutes was more exhausting than Harry had envisioned, and the moment Remus was gone he waddled over the couch as hastily as he could manage, while he tried to ignore his spinning head and racing heart.

"Bloody anxiety..." Harry muttered as he shot a mock glare at his rotund belly. "If it weren't for you, I'd have some sort of mood-stabilizing potion by now..."

"Uncle Daddy?" Teddy asked, toddling into the room with his thumb popped into his mouth, something Harry hadn't seen Teddy do in months. "I mean...Other Daddy? Are you okay? You look sleepy already."

Harry opened his arms, and Teddy clambered into his lap, while Harry gently coaxed the boy's hand away from his mouth, and Teddy let go of his thumb without protest. He settled into Harry's side, and gazed up at Harry with a sweet sort of adoration in his eyes.

"A bit tired, Ted," Harry admitted as he ruffled Teddy's hair, making him giggle. "Maybe I was being a bit too ambitious when I suggested you invite over your friend today. And...you know, if it's easier, you can always just call me Papa, instead of Other Daddy. It's a bit less of a mouthful, don't you think?"

"Papa...Papa...Pa-pa..." Teddy trailed off as he muttered the word under his breath a few dozen more times before at last he nodded, smiling brightly. "Papa is nice. We don't have to invite Leigh over if you don't want to. I can play Kneazles and Hinkypunks with you instead!"

Harry laughed, but nodded, unable to say no to Teddy's sweet face.

~*~

Kneasles and Hinkypunks was, in Harry's estimation, rather a lot like the wizard equivalent of Snakes and Ladders. The goal of the game was to move your character from the edges of a marsh and into the centre of the board, where a big chest of gold was located, while not getting taken off-course by the Hinkypunks. The players could be pirates or privateers, and Harry could still recall with absolute clarity the first time Teddy had asked what a privateer was, which spurred Remus into a long, drawn-out explanation that seemed to go right over Teddy's head, at which point Harry had interjected, "they're just legal pirates, Ted."

"Legal Pirates?" Remus asked, blinking in confusion at Harry's over-simplification.

"Dearheart, you were making your explanation very Binns-ish. I will not have you bore our son to death like that."

Harry smiled at the memory as they set the game up, and the pair played a few dozen rounds. Harry had to get up frequently to use the toilet, and with it came more unsettling dizzy spells.

In front of Teddy, Harry did all that he could to smile through it. He didn't want to scare his son, after all, and Harry knew that the anxiety was from what he had to do tomorrow, and not a complication from his pregnancy.

"It's not a complication, it's *not* a complication..." Harry muttered to himself as he sat in the kitchen and used his wand to put together some sandwiches and salad for his and Teddy's lunch. His feet were swollen and hurting, and he hoped that Remus would get home soon, if only to rub Harry's aching feet.

When Harry got up to call Teddy to eat, his vision blurred for a moment, but he didn't allow himself to think on it. It had happened a few times before in conjunction with his dizzy spells, and after Harry shook his head a couple times, it seemed to clear.

If Teddy noticed anything, he didn't speak on it, and instead chattered away happily while they ate. However, Harry found that he didn't have much appetite, and could only stomach about a quarter of his chicken and ham sandwich before he had to push the food aside.

After lunch, and while Teddy was in the midst of asking if he could go play outside, Remus returned finally home. Teddy let out a delighted squeal, and rushed at his father.

Harry stood from his spot on the sofa, intending to greet his alpha.

At that same moment, everything seemed to go horribly wrong.

Harry opened his mouth to speak when all his pervading symptoms seemed to assault him at once—his vision blurred, his head felt like he'd hopped onto a carousel travelling at hyper-speed, and he vomited his meagre lunch up before he could even think to try and stop it.

Harry glanced up to Remus, his head still spinning and his heart racing. A sharp pain shot through his left arm and down his back.

In the same instant, his world went black.

~*~

The first thing that Harry was aware of as his consciousness began to filter back to him was the smell.

An overly clean, antiseptic smell.

Without even opening his eyes, Harry knew that he was in the hospital.

Though his brain immediately jumped into panic mode, his body was slower to respond. He was nauseous and woozy, his mouth felt as though it had been stuffed with cotton, and his entire body felt heavy. When his eyes slowly blinked open, he was gifted with the sight of a blurry Remus Lupin sitting above him in a darkened room.

“Hey, love,” Remus said, his voice cracked and drowsy, both like he was emotionally wrung-out and completely exhausted all at once.

“Hi,” Harry replied, his own voice cracking in a similar fashion, and the word escaping him slowly, as though he hadn't spoken in a while. “What...happened? Where's...where's home? Why is not...home?”

Harry blinked again, frustrated and confused. Though the words had escaped him slowly, and in an order that made very little sense, Remus seemed to understand what he was getting at, and offered his hand a gentle squeeze.

“Oh, love, it's a long story—”

“—need to know,” Harry slurred. He tried to sit up, but Remus moved to press a hand to his shoulder gently, stilling his movements.

“Harry, I'll tell you, but you need to lie down and rest, all right? Your body had been through a lot.” Remus paused, and lifted a water glass from his side table. “Do you need water?”

“Yes,” Harry mumbled. “Both—yes.”

Remus offered Harry a small sip of the water, then pulled back, setting it aside as he began to speak. Harry tried to sit up again, but Remus responded with a look. Harry huffed, and slumped back down on the bed.

“I’m not certain how much you remember, but the moment I got in, you fainted,” Remus began as he once again reached for Harry’s hand, and clutched it almost on the side of too tight. “Teddy, as you can imagine, got very upset. I called Madam Pomfrey, and when she arrived she examined you for little more than a moment before she started casting spells and administering potions, which was when you developed a stain on your trousers. She told me that I needed to get you to Saint Mungo’s straightaway, and she would wait with Teddy until Andromeda arrived to mind him, then she intended to proceed to the hospital to give the healers all the information that they would need in order to treat you.

“It was...chaos,” Remus continued, his voice breaking a little as he spoke. “I Apparated to the hospital with you even as Teddy screamed and cried, pitching a fit over the fact that he couldn’t come along, but if...if you...I didn’t want him to witness that.”

Remus paused for a moment, as though he’d lost the will to speak. His breaths escaped him in trembling gasps, and Harry shifted his hand just enough for their fingers to intertwine. This small act seemed to renew Remus’s courage, and he smiled at Harry tearfully before he at last continued with the story.

“I can’t exactly recall what I told the healers, though I must have said something to the effect of what had happened. I was terrified that something awful had happened to you, or the baby, or both.” Remus’s voice broke again, and he paused in order to wipe his eyes with his free hand. “They rushed you away and made me wait, and for nearly three hours they tended to you. I kept asking what was happening, but the welcomewitch seemed incapable of telling me anything beyond *sit down*. It was awful.

“At last, the head healer came and told me that you’d fainted from your blood pressure—it was apparently sky-high; that was what was causing the dizzy spells. It was so bad that you nearly had a heart attack, but Madam Pomfrey’s potions stopped it from becoming fatal. In the midst of all that, your body went into a sort of shock...I’m afraid that I cannot recall the exact term the healer used, and you went into premature labour. They tried to stop it with potions and spells, but you were too far along by the time we got here, and...and they needed to deliver the baby by caesarean.”

Remus shifted in his seat in a pointed sort of way, and Harry turned his head slowly. Next to his alpha was a small cot, sealed off and seemingly made of glass with arm-sized holes in the sides—an Intensive Care Cot. Inside was a tiny pink baby with a little cap on their head, so small that they couldn’t’ve been more than two pounds.

Harry felt a numb sort of disbelief at the sight, not quite able to believe what he was seeing. He tried to lift his arm in order to touch his now-flat stomach, but he was still too weak to manage such a movement.

“She's exactly twenty-seven weeks, born two days ago on the nineteenth October, but her lungs are very weak,” Remus explained softly. “The healers are hopeful, though—they say that she's gaining small amounts of weight every day, which is a very good sign. I'd asked about speeding the process along, but I was told that it's safer for her to develop naturally, rather than by using potions or magic. However, we won't know for certain if she'll pull through for a little while yet—the healers want to keep her here until our original due date, thirteen weeks from now.”

Harry felt a warm tear drip onto his arm as Remus's explanation slowly petered out, but he couldn't bring himself to turn away from the tiny, blurry baby. He wanted his glasses in order to see her properly, but Harry couldn't quite get his voice to work. His mind felt almost overloaded with questions and needs, but despairingly, he could get none of them to pass his lips as he continued to stare at his newborn daughter.

“She...” Harry began, his voice barely above a whisper as he gazed at his daughter. She was so little. So much smaller than he thought a baby *could* be. It was enthralling and agonizing all at once.

Taking a shaking breath, Harry opened his mouth again to try and find the right words to ask for what he needed. At the same moment, Remus gently slipped his glasses on his face, bringing the whole room into sharper focus, as though he'd known what Harry had wanted to ask. Harry offered his mate a small smile of thanks, then turned his attention back to his child.

The baby was asleep. Her tiny body was pink all over, and her little hands were curled around what looked to be a bright purple crochet octopus with curly tentacles, and her breath was coming out in small, reedy little puffs.

“Has Teddy seen her yet?” Harry asked as he tried to reach out for the cot, though he was too weak to do so, retracting his arm while he added, “and where did the octopus come from?”

“Molly,” Remus replied with a small, wry smile. “One of the younger healers mentioned that toy octopi like that with curled tentacles mimic the umbilical cord, and can help preemie babies feel comforted due to the fact that she's still too delicate to be handled. So, naturally, Molly instantly whipped one up. And yes, Teddy came to see her once things had calmed down—yesterday. He's at home now.”

“Oh. Why?”

“It's two o'clock in the morning, love,” Remus said as he leant in to kiss Harry's temple. “He'll be back tomorrow, as will everyone else—we've all been so worried about you.”

“Oh,” Harry said again, and Remus let out a soft little huff of laughter. “Does Teddy like his baby sister, at least?”

“I didn't say anything straightaway, I wanted the gender to be a surprise. I just let him come over and see her, and his first question was, *Daddy, where's his pee-pee?* Honestly, I think he was mostly disappointed that she's a girl beyond anything else.”

Harry chuckled softly, able to picture with absolute clarity such a reaction from his adoptive son, while his eyes remained fixed on his little girl.

“So...I guess I missed the trial, eh?”

“I went in your stead, and offered up memory evidence of our Patronus conversations,” Remus replied softly. “Along with all the other evidence that was presented, it was enough to put Lucius away for twenty-five years, though he will be able to apply for parole fifteen years from now.”

“Plenty of time to draft good reasons why he should stay right where he is, at least,” Harry mused, which caused Remus to chuckle again. “I’m glad, both that I didn’t have to do it, and that he’s been put away. Though it sort of makes this whole ordeal seem like a big waste...”

“I have it under good authority that your high blood pressure problems were exacerbated by the pregnancy, not by anxiety,” Remus replied, and when Harry glanced up, he saw that Remus was smiling, and no longer crying, perhaps in relief that Harry was finally awake. “It’s called pre-eclampsia, but we misinterpreted the symptoms as anxiety over the impending trial, which ultimately led to this...*mess*.”

“Not a mess,” Harry replied as his gaze again fell to his daughter. “She’ll pull through, I know that she will. With our genes, there’s no *way* that she’d let go that easily.”

“I wish I had your positivity,” Remus said softly. “I’m just so scared, Harry. After everything...I don’t want to lose her, not after I almost lost you.”

“We *won’t*,” Harry insisted, though his voice was still reedy with exhaustion. “Come on, how about you name her? If she has a name, maybe it’ll give you a little more faith that she’ll make it through, you know?”

The logic made sense in Harry’s head, but by the look Remus was giving him, perhaps it did not go over as well as he thought. Despite this, Remus offered Harry a smile, and a gentle squeeze of his hand.

“All right, let me see...” Remus paused, chewing his lower lip, his eyes shifting from Harry to the tiny baby in her special cot, pausing for a long moment before he said, “what do you think of...Abigail?”

“Abigail...” Harry echoed as he gazed at his daughter. “I like it. It’s...nice. Where did that name come from?”

“One of the books that Hermione gave you on your birthday,” Remus replied with another soft smile. “Abigail means...one who brings joy.”

“One who brings joy...” Harry said softly as he watched his little girl let out a little sigh in sleep. “Perfect.”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: (end) The octopus thing is true, not just something I invented. You can read more about it here: www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/amp/entry/octopus-for-a-preemie-new-parents_uk_5a5786f7e4b05b7a92eeb32c

Special thanks to the members of the Fanfiction Writers United Facebook group for all their help with my preemie questions, and to my wonderful beta, Jess, for all their help with my endless medical questions.

The name-meaning for Abigail is derived from The Writer's Digest Character Naming Sourcebook, and may have an alternate meaning from a different source.

Small Joys

Chapter Notes

A/N: Next update is scheduled for September 24th. Enjoy!

Special thanks to my beta, Jess, and again to the Facebook Group, Fanfiction Writers United for all their preemie info help. I did my best to make it as accurate as possible (while smooshing it together within a wizarding context) and I hope that I have done this subject the justice that it deserves :)

Correction: It was brought to my attention that my timing for how long Abigail will be hospitalized, as well as her initial weight were slightly off. I corrected it, and I do not feel that if you've already read the chapter you need to go back and reread it, considering how small the adjustment is to the overall plot. Just know that her weight guesstimate by Harry was changed to 1-2lbs, and her hospital stay has been lengthened to 13 weeks.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Chapter Twenty-Four – Small Joys

Harry didn't recall falling back to sleep, but when he woke again it was morning.

Remus was slumped forward slightly in his chair, while baby Abigail was lying motionless in her little glass cot, though the tiny movements of her chest told Harry that she was breathing and not in any present danger.

Watching her, Harry felt a distinct ache in his chest. Unlike with a muggle hospital, the baby was not surrounded by dozens of beeping or buzzing machines, but the signs of how intense her care was was still clear. He recognized all her accoutrements; things Harry still knew the names of from his work in the hospital before all this had happened.

The cots, like all the NICU cots, were charmed and warded against all manner of infection. This enabled people to visit with her, as well as have the cot stay with Harry in the room, which was a true blessing—he had no idea how anxious he'd be about her condition if he hadn't been able to watch over her.

In addition to the special cot, glittering tubes snaked from a number of IV bags affixed to a rack behind the cot and into the safe, infection-free glass, where they were then attached to his baby girl. There was a cannula in her nose, not unlike the muggle variations of the same design, but they seemed to be attached to nothing, though Harry knew they automatically pumped oxygen into her tiny nose in careful, measured doses. They would be

checked regularly to ensure both that they were working properly, and that they were not administering too much or too little oxygen, and thus causing further complications.

There was another tube snaking from the corner of her little mouth, and it was attached to a bag of formula, which seemed to glitter in the soft morning light, infused with what Harry suspected to be a preemie-safe variation of Strengthening Serum, as well as stasis charms upon the bags themselves to keep the formula and various potions from spoiling and making Abigail sick.

The last IV, affixed to a bag of translucent solution, which appeared to be tinted faintly violet, was affixed to Abigail's little arm, pumping her with another potion, though by sight Harry couldn't tell which one. At last, little white circular stickers had been stuck to her chest and abdomen, almost like electrodes, and from these, the information about her heart rate, as well as the function of her internal organs would appear regularly on the side of the glass cot, before updating again a few seconds later.

Harry felt hot tears streaking his cheeks, and dampening his pillow, though he could not tell when he had begun to cry. One of his hands, still heavy with exhaustion, moved to his flat stomach, touching it gingerly. He was still tender from the procedure, but not bandaged up like he may have been from a muggle C-section. Harry knew that a Suturing Spell would have been used to close him up right away, but for a few days the area would be sensitive and delicate from the spell.

And yet, despite his own pain, all Harry wanted was to gather his baby girl into his arms and hold her close. The knowledge that she'd be too delicate for that yet felt like a physical wound, and despite the logical parts of Harry's brain telling him that this wasn't his fault, at the same time he struggled to truly believe it.

"Oh, baby..." Harry whispered, "I'm *so* sorry. Please, please be okay..."

A soft tapping upon his door roused Harry from his tumultuous thoughts, while Remus snorted loudly and unattractively as he was jolted awake by the noise. Harry glanced up, just in time to see a healer step into the room with his breakfast tray, and he was shocked to realize that he recognized her immediately.

"Hermione!" he said, his voice still a little weak and croaky as he forced himself to sit up, though it felt very much like he was trying to lift a sixteen-ton weight with his teeth. "You're my healer?"

"I'm still just a trainee, like you, if you ever come back here," she teased, smiling warmly as she stepped inside. "I may have pestered the head healer for the NICU until they let me help with your baby, and convinced them that you'd be less of a troublesome patient if you had someone around who you could *really* trust."

"Hermione's been brilliant," Remus offered, stifling a yawn as he sat up a little, and nodded his thanks as Hermione set down Harry's breakfast tray on the little side table affixed to his bed, and conjured the alpha a cup of strong coffee. "She's been checking in with Abigail even more often than our fully-licensed healer, ensuring that everything is all right with her. There were a few close calls that we may have missed had it not been for Hermione's diligence."

“Close calls?” Harry immediately asked, “what sort of close calls?”

“Oh, you picked a name?” Hermione asked excitedly, but to Harry's frown at her distraction from his question, she cleared her throat before she moved back to the more serious matter at hand.

“The sleep apnea episodes were our biggest concern,” Hermione said as she adjusted the position of the side table until it rested directly in front of Harry and she gave the omega a pointed look. Obediently, Harry started on his porridge while Hermione continued to speak.

“As you probably know, Harry, too much or too little oxygen can be detrimental to anyone's health, but especially right now when she's so delicate,” Hermione explained in a distinctly professorish tone of voice. “She stopped breathing a few times, and I was on hand to fix the monitoring charms after we got her breathing again, making them more sensitive to catch when she might be having an episode, rather than after she actually stops breathing. She was also struggling with some liver function when she was first placed in the incubator, and it quickly led to jaundice. The healer who was assigned to you kept insisting she'd *get over it*. Needless to say, I took it upon myself to administer the proper potions to help her liver along as it grows, given that the healer was too *foolish* to recognize what was happening.”

“I hope you put in a complaint on that one,” Harry said, and Hermione smiled.

“Yeah, of course. Premie babies require so *much* special care, they can't just *get over* things. What a *stupid* thing to say!” she huffed with annoyance, her tone giving Harry the impression that she was just barely keeping herself from shouting out in frustration. “Anyway, he's been moved to another ward. You got Healer White for your care now; I'm supposed to just be doing the check-ins and things.”

“Healer White is good,” Harry said with an approving nod, “I always liked her.”

“Hermione,” Remus interjected, his voice a little hesitant as he spoke, “please, be honest with us, what are the chances of Abigail surviving through this?”

“Well, I'm not the healer, I'm still only a trainee,” Hermione hedged, biting her lip nervously. “From my research, I can say that on average eighty nine to ninety percent of premies in Abigail's age bracket make it, but honestly, it depends on a lot of factors going forward. We need to make sure that the anti-infection warding is strong, because her immune system is practically non-existent at the moment. As long as we can keep her healthy, as long as she gains weight gradually, and provided her internal organs continue to improve, she has every chance in the world of making it through this.”

“What Hermione said,” Harry replied with a small nod. He paused to eat another spoonful of porridge before he added, “I know it's hard, love, but with young babies like this it's a wait-and-see game. I trust Hermione, and I trust Healer White. Plus, I did a few weeks in the NICU before I was moved to Mind Damage, so as hard as it is, I have seen babies as small as her pull through. Really, as long as she's gaining weight and we're all watching her heart and the function of her other organs, she's got every chance of making it through this.”

“Which is good, because the less worrying Harry does, the better,” Hermione said teasingly. “You have your own healing to do— *lots of rest*. That means no getting out of bed.”

“I had pre-eclampsia, Hermione,” Harry protested thickly around another mouthful of porridge. “Which as we both know would have resolved itself after Abigail was born. It would've only taken a few days for my blood pressure to even itself out, so I'm *fine* .”

“Just because the danger's passed doesn't mean you can start dancing round the room, Harry,” Hermione countered crossly. “You need to *rest* and let your body heal. And I have a small army of people who have promised to help make sure you stay put.”

“Did most of this small army have red hair?” Harry asked teasingly, and Hermione giggled as her serious demeanour seemed to fall, at least for the moment.

“All but four,” she replied, her eyes sliding to Remus, and Harry laughed, stopping short as he realized what she said.

“Wait...four?”

“The Weasleys, Andromeda, little Teddy—Remus hasn't left your side, of course—and Malfoy popped in. When I caught him he acted like he'd gotten turned around, and wasn't really there to check on you. He was quite embarrassed, but Charlie thought it was funny.”

“Well, as long as he didn't try to hex me in my sleep, I don't really mind him visiting,” Harry admitted, and grinned when Hermione let out a little giggle.

“He behaved,” she confirmed, “I think he was actually *worried* about you, if you can believe it. The way I've been hearing it, he's been in quite a good mood ever since his father was sentenced, and he's gleefully refused to visit him.”

“It's a little hard to picture,” Harry said as he ate a little more porridge, and sipped his tea. “I mean, considering how much he looked up to Lucius in school.”

“People change, and they grow up,” Hermione said in a gentle, almost reassuring tone, which Harry didn't really understand, as he wasn't particularly upset by Malfoy's change of heart. “Some sooner than others. I think being with Charlie has been good for him; he's much less of a discriminatory prick these days.”

Harry barked a laugh, but the loud noise seemed to startle Abigail, and she let out a soft, wheezy cry.

Harry felt his stomach drop as the impossibly tiny baby cried, at a loss for how to console her without hurting her.

“Watch, Harry,” Remus said, his smile reassuring, and he moved over to Abigail's cot. He slipped a hand beneath it and retrieved a set of what appeared to be dragonhide gloves. He put them on, then flicked his wand at them, presumably casting some sort of disinfection charm on them, before he pressed his gloved right hand against a circle upon the glass siding,

and his hand sank into it. It sealed around Remus's wrist, and once inside the cot he reached out with his pinkie and let Abigail grab onto it weakly.

“There, there, little one,” Remus cooed even as Abigail's tiny cries petered out, and she gasped for breath a few times before she settled. Harry felt his stomach turn over with worry at the sound, but Hermione was there in an instant, flicking her wand and muttering under her breath in what appeared to be diagnostic spells while Remus continued to speak. “It's all right, darling. Your papa just made a big sound. There, just relax.”

Harry smiled warmly, watching as Remus at last removed his hand from the incubator, and peeled off the gloves. The hand that had been inside the incubator was an angry red like it had been badly sunburned, which Harry knew was a side effect from aggressive anti-infection warding, ensuring that any bad bacteria was eradicated before it could touch the weak little baby.

“She's okay, Harry,” Hermione filled in. “Poor little thing, her lungs are still very weak. I'll let Healer White know—it's quite possible she might develop asthma as she grows, but we won't be able to offer her restorative potions until she's a bit stronger, and we know for sure that it is indeed asthma, and not another respiratory issue.”

“Yeah, 'course,” Harry agreed. From his studies, he knew that most kids with asthma weren't diagnosed until they were a few years old, at least. Until then, they just had to keep a close eye on her breathing. “Have her sleep apnea episodes been very frequent?”

“In the first twenty-four hours she had three, then only one yesterday,” Hermione replied. “The downturn in the frequency is a good sign, Harry.”

“Yeah,” Harry repeated, smiling faintly despite his worry for his daughter. “It implies that her lungs are improving, not deteriorating.”

“Right,” Hermione replied with an approving smile. “We'll probably weigh her again around midday to see if she's gained any weight since yesterday. In the meantime, I want you to try and rest—don't let your visitors wear you out, do you hear me?”

“Would *visitors* be a sort of euphemism for my son?” Harry asked teasingly, and she answered with a smile.

“Finish your porridge, Harry,” she replied, making Harry laugh again.

~*~

Teddy arrived with Andromeda the moment that visiting hours began.

The boy was hugging his toy bear to his chest with one arm, the thumb of the same hand popped into his mouth, while Andromeda held Teddy's other hand as she guided the boy into the room. He looked a little more reserved than Harry could ever recall seeing him before,

but Teddy brightened the moment that he saw that Harry was awake, and raced forward with an excited half-cry, as though he belatedly remembered that he was supposed to be quiet in order to not wake his tiny baby sister.

“Uncle Papa!” Teddy said, clambering onto the hospital bed eagerly, and apparently not noticing his verbal slip, while Remus placed a hand under the boy to help him up before Teddy all but fell on Harry with an excited hug. “Me and Daddy were so scared! You were asleep for so long and...and...”

His bottom lip quivered, and quite suddenly, he began to cry.

“Oh, sweetheart,” Harry said with a warm laugh as he drew Teddy into a hug, and the poor boy sobbed into his shoulder, even as Harry began to rub his back consolingly. “There, there. See? I'm fine. I'm fine and your baby sister is fine too. Why are you crying?”

“B-Because I m-missed you!” Teddy howled, causing Abigail to fuss a little, and Remus moved to try and console her, given that Harry's arms were still full of their son.

“Oh, Ted, I'm here now,” Harry replied, smiling fondly as he just let Teddy cry it out.

Andromeda took her time seating herself down in the chair opposite of Harry, while he continued to rub Teddy's back in the hope that the contact would help settle him, and continued to speak softly. “Just because I was uncon—er, *asleep* —for a few days doesn't mean anything bad. We sleep to get better, you know? You sleep when you're tired, and then when you wake up, you're ready for a brand new day.”

“D-Does that mean you're all better now?” Teddy asked between soft sniffles, while he rubbed his cherry-red nose on his sleeve. “Can you and the baby come home?”

“Not yet, love,” Harry replied, his voice soft and consoling as he spoke, in the hopes that the gentle tone would stop Teddy from getting upset again. “I need to stay here for a few days. I need lots of naps before I'll feel well enough to come home, but you can visit with me as long as you like. Your baby sister, Abigail, she is very tiny, and should have stayed in my tummy a lot longer, so now she needs lots of medical help before she's ready to come home with us.”

“I promised Auntie Hermione that I'd not make you too tired,” Teddy offered, his voice a little more meek than his usual excitable self, as though he was afraid Harry might turn him away if he misbehaved. The thought caused Harry's hold on the boy to tighten a little. “And I only cried a little bit when Daddy wouldn't let me hold the baby. But I don't like her name, Papa. You should name her something else.”

“Oh yeah?” Harry asked with a small chuckle, “like what?”

“Like Valanor, the Unhinged Emperor of the Damned!” Teddy immediately responded, and Harry snorted loudly.

“And what *has* your daddy been reading to you, exactly?”

“It's a big book, but not a boring book!” Teddy chirped happily. There's knights and dragons and everything. It's amazing! It's called... *The Adventures of Sir Eason, the Brave.* ”

“Oh, I see,” Harry replied with a soft chuckle. “And is this Valanor person a character?”

“No, I made him up,” Teddy said proudly. “But I think my baby sister needs a *cool* name.”

“Well, I think we might stick with Abigail this time, Ted,” Harry said as he patted Teddy's head fondly, and the boy stuck out his bottom lip in a distinctive pout.

“That's not a very good name, Papa,” he said, repeating his sentiment again, and causing Harry to chuckle.

“Don't worry, son,” Harry replied, “you'll get used to it.”

~*~

Teddy and Andromeda stayed for a few hours, well through Abigail's mid-afternoon check-up, where Hermione came by to check on Abigail's weight and the function of her internal organs in order to ensure that everything was still progressing as it should.

Teddy sucked his thumb as he watched the proceedings from his perch on the edge of the bed, his little legs swinging absently as he watched. Hermione pretended not to notice her audience as she went about inspecting the information that wrote itself across the side of Abigail's incubator. She then waved her wand at the baby, which Harry knew was Hermione checking his daughter's weight, before she moved on to change a few of the IV and formula bags for fresh ones, then at last moved over to Harry to inspect his sealed incision from the C-section, and checked his blood pressure to ensure that it was staying at a safe level.

“How's she looking, Doc?” Harry asked teasingly, in the hope that a little levity would lessen the knot of anxiety in the pit of his stomach. Hermione and Remus laughed at his remark, while Andromeda and Teddy looked on in confusion at the very muggle term.

“She's doing well, Harry,” Hermione replied with a reassuring smile. “Healer White is going over a potions regimen for her, and once she's settled on something she'll come by and go over it with you and Remus. Until then she's asked me to monitor Abigail's weight and everything else. So far she's gained a little less than eight grams today, which is a very positive sign. As long as we do our best to minimize any road blocks, so to speak, I have every confidence that she'll get home to you before you know it.”

“Yeah,” Harry replied as he cast a look at the tiny newborn, while at the same time he hugged Teddy close, and the boy silently rested his head on Harry's shoulder. “I hope so.”

A/N: For my American readers, 8g is slightly over $\frac{1}{4}$ of an ounce.

Also special thanks to my baby brother (who is 24 :P) for offering up Teddy's baby-naming suggestion.

The NICU Family Room

Chapter Notes

A/N: Next update is scheduled for October 8th. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Chapter Twenty-Five – The NICU Family Room

Healer White finally made an appearance on Harry's third day in hospital, and she looked exactly as he remembered her.

Her dark brown hair was pulled away from her face in a long plait, and despite her age, she looked quite youthful, far younger than her fifty-three years. Her eyes were hazel and her skin bore a slight olive tinge.

“Harry, good morning,” she said, smiling, “I’m sorry that I have not come to see you sooner, but unfortunately we had another premature baby come in, even younger than your Abigail, and he needed all my attention.”

“How young?” Harry asked curiously, while his hand tensed in Remus's. His mate had not left his side since he woke up, and it was beginning to show in how exhausted he was, though Remus had not yet voiced a single word of complaint.

“Twenty-two weeks,” she replied with a small wince. “Miracle he is alive. He will have a hard few months of recovery.”

“Is there that big a difference between birth at twenty-two weeks versus twenty-seven weeks?” Remus asked curiously, and the healer nodded.

“Oh yes, very big,” she replied. “The earlier a baby is born, the more complications there are. We want to keep the baby in the womb as long as is possible, unless it is dangerous for the birth parent. In Harry's case, it was much safer for both parent and child to deliver the baby prematurely, rather than risk leaving the baby in the womb.”

“And Abigail's doing really well,” Harry offered, his tone a touch on the defensive side, which made White smile, and Remus chuckle. “She's gaining weight, and Hermione showed me how to pump myself—” Harry broke off when Remus suddenly went red, and he rolled his eyes. “*For milk*, you berk. I need to, otherwise when Abigail is strong enough to suckle, I will have dried out, so I need to do it regularly.”

“Yes, that was a smart move on her part,” White said with an approving nod. “Many parents of premature babies forget about that step, in particular if they planned to breastfeed, it can be quite upsetting to find that they have no milk to give. However, you're doing all the right

steps, and I can see you're both dedicated to her recovery. Now, if I may, I'd like to examine you, and see how *you* are doing."

"All right," Harry agreed with a small laugh, and White smiled again.

~*~

The examination was fairly quick compared to what Abigail had needed over the last few days, and largely painless. White palpated Harry's abdomen a few times, checking to see how the suturing spells were holding up, and she had a look at his blood pressure and milk production, then moved on to see how Abigail was doing.

"Ah," White said as she smiled at the little medical bracelet on Abigail's wrist, "you had her birth certificate drawn up, then?"

"Yesterday," Harry replied, "then her full name was printed on her bracelet."

"Abigail Dora Lupin-Potter," she repeated while she checked the infant over. "What a lovely middle name."

"It was the shortened version of my adoptive son's mother's name," Harry explained proudly, feeling that it sounded nicer than *my partner's ex-wife*. "She was a really special woman."

"Yes," Remus agreed, his voice adopting a slightly croaky tone as he squeezed Harry's hand. "She was."

The examination continued as normal, with White inspecting Abigail with a careful, critical eye. Compared to Hermione's hasty check-ups, White's was much more detailed, and as a result took much longer.

The wait made Harry feel anxious as he watched the healer work. Even with having a background in healing, White primarily used non-verbal spells, which did not help Harry to figure out what she was doing. Abigail was still so delicate that White never took her out of her incubator, and instead relied, as Hermione had, on diagnostic spellwork to determine how she was doing.

"Well," White said as she finished, "Abigail is doing really well. She has gained seven grams today, and since her birth she's gained a total of thirty, which is very, *very* promising. I'm going to keep her on her preemie formula and Strengthening Serum for the foreseeable future, in particular to ensure she keeps gaining weight.

"Her organs, by and large, are functioning as they should, save her lungs and liver. I'm going to add a development accelerant to her IV to help her liver grow more efficiently. When she's past her intended term date we can look into fully mending it, but for the moment she is far

too delicate for such an invasive procedure—too much can go wrong. Her lungs are also still quite weak, and I am fairly certain that she may develop asthma as she gets older. The last thing is her eyes.”

“Her eyes?” Harry asked, his heart clenching a little. He couldn't remember anyone saying anything to him about something being wrong with Abigail's eyes before. “What about her eyes?”

“Less light is penetrating her cornea than is normal at this stage, even for a preemie,” White said. “I cannot recall how far your studies went, Harry, but healing procedures on eyes is not recommended, especially on a child so young—too much can go wrong, and the Ministry had banned such practices in many places. If her sight continues at this rate, she may grow up legally blind, and at the moment the best I can do is add a DHA Extract to her formula, and hope that the extra DHA improves her eyes naturally.”

“Oh.” Harry frowned, his eyes trailing away from the healer, and over to where Abigail lay. While the idea of a blind child did not change his feelings towards her, it did make his heart ache for her. He turned back to White as he asked, “What can I do?”

“Unfortunately, nothing,” White replied with a sad sort of smile. “We're still at the *wait and see* stage of her recovery. Her sight may yet improve, but it might not. You just need to prepare for the worst, and hope for the best.”

~*~

Harry lay slumped in bed that day, his eyes fixed upon little Abigail. Hermione had stopped by to administer the new potions White had prescribed, but it appeared she understood that Harry was not in the mood to chat, and said little before she added the potions to Abigail's IV and formula sacs, then left again.

Remus held Harry's hand, and used the opposing limb to pet his hair in a comforting, reassuring gesture. The presence of his alpha was calming, and when Teddy came to visit, he seemed to understand that his papa was upset about something, and instead of chattering animatedly about his day, instead he curled up in Harry's side, and stayed quiet, while Remus softly explained to Andromeda what had happened.

Harry hated his attitude, and yet he had no idea how to change it. He knew he wouldn't love his daughter any less if it turned out that she'd grow up legally blind (whatever that meant, he hadn't thought to ask White about the finer details) but at the same time the notion that his daughter might never be able to see the faces of her parents utterly broke his heart.

Harry managed to keep it together until Teddy left, when he let out a soft, choking cry, and Remus immediately embraced him, whispering words of comfort as Harry wept into his

shoulder.

~*~

The coming days were much of the same. Harry was discharged officially when Abigail turned twenty-nine weeks old, but despite being able to leave the bed and get into some proper clothing, Harry point-blank refused to leave the hospital without his daughter.

Remus seemed to understand Harry's sentiment, though it was clear that he did not agree with it. He went home every night to be with Teddy, while Harry remained resolutely by Abigail's side, unwilling to leave her side even for a moment.

As a result, Harry was moved to what the NICU Healers called a *NICU Family Room*, which was as intensively sterile as the rest of the ward, but designed for omega parents whose maternal instinct were too strong to bear leaving their child alone. It included a very antique-looking four-poster bed, armchair, and small wardrobe for a few changes of clothes. Hermione seemed to understand Harry's need to stay with Abigail, at least on an academic level, having apparently inhaled several volumes on the subject, but it clearly upset Remus that Harry was refusing to come home, though he had yet to explicitly say so to Harry's face.

Little changed in the fortnight that followed. Abigail continued to gain weight steadily, and by her thirty-first week, she had gone up to 1500 grams, which White told him was right on schedule.

Paired with this news however was a surprise, one Harry had not expected to come so soon.

"Harry, I think she is strong enough now to nurse, if you'd like to try," White said, and Harry leapt from the armchair where he'd been sitting next to his baby, his eyes bright and wide.

"Yes, yes! Of course!" Harry burst out, which caused White to chuckle at his excitement. "What do I have to do?"

"You need to change into a gown, and we need to perform a few sterilization charms on you to ensure that no infection is transferred to her, then you should sit in your armchair or on the bed and allow her to try and suckle," White explained patiently. "She may struggle at first to figure out what to do, but be patient with her, and I can be on hand if you need any help."

"Can Remus be here too when I try?" Harry asked, "I'd hate for him to miss this."

"Provided he is willing to have us perform the same sterilization charms, I see no reason why not," White replied with a small smile. "However, unfortunately it would be ill-advised for your son to join you while Abigail is out of the incubator. Children carry rather a lot of diseases, and I feel that it may be too risky to have them in same room right now."

“All right,” Harry agreed readily. While it hurt to not have Teddy witness this, from his studies he knew it to be true—had they been in a muggle hospital, Harry knew that Teddy would not have been allowed to see Abigail at all until she was officially discharged. As far as he was concerned, this was the lesser of the two evils.

Harry drafted a hasty letter to Remus, explaining things and asking him to leave Teddy with Andromeda, and making sure that Remus understood exactly why Harry was requesting such a thing—he didn't want Remus to assume that Harry was choosing one of their children over the other.

After the letter was sent, Harry paced restlessly, hardly noticing when Hermione came in to check on Abigail. Her feeding tube was temporarily removed, cleared out of potion and formula and sterilized thoroughly, though her cannula and IV remained in place. The removal of the tube made Harry feel giddy with newfound hope. Though Abigail had nine more weeks before she'd be allowed to go home, one less tube jutting from his daughter's tiny body made Harry feel as though she truly would get through this.

Hermione left a hospital gown for Harry to change into, and he excitedly stripped out of his clothes and tugged the garment on. Unlike a traditional hospital gown, this one bore a zip down the front, enabling Harry to open it easily so that Abigail could nurse.

Once he was changed, Harry sat in his armchair, his leg bouncing restlessly, but thankfully he did not need to wait long. Remus burst into the room less than half an hour after Harry had sent his owl, and the omega smiled broadly at him, getting up and rushing at his mate in a hug, their lips crashing together as they hadn't since before Abigail was born, as though this small spark of good news had rekindled their romance, and dimmed some of the stress over the baby's precarious condition.

“We need to go get Healer White,” Harry whispered in between feverish, needy kisses. “She'll be doing the sterilization charms to make sure Abigail doesn't get sick.”

“Shall I get her?” Remus murmured, his soft tone giving Harry the impression that he really didn't want to go anywhere.

“No need,” a third voice chimed in, and White laughed warmly when Harry and Remus jumped apart. “Are you ready, Harry?”

“Yeah, more than ready,” Harry replied with a grin, which caused White to laugh again as she stepped forward, and began to cast the necessary charms over both of them, as well as herself and the room at large, ensuring that the space and people involved were as sanitary as possible before they risked taking the tiny baby out of her safe, infection-free zone.

“One final touch,” White said as she offered Harry and Remus each a pair of sterile, medical-grade dragonhide gloves, which they both pulled on without protest. She directed Harry to sit on the bed, and Remus eased down next to him. Harry unzipped the front of the hospital gown in preparation, watching anxiously as White waved her wand, causing the very top of

the incubator to vanish, and she gave Abigail one last check-over before she gently slipped her gloved hands beneath the tiny baby, scooped her up, and carried her to the bed.

Harry let out a small sigh as Abigail was placed gently in his arms. The tiny weight was so soothing, and Harry smiled, feeling much of the stress and uncertainty that had accompanied Abigail's birth melt away in that moment—the moment that he was *finally* able to embrace his little daughter.

“Let's see if you're hungry, my love,” Harry murmured, carefully lifting the tiny girl to his chest, and guiding her to his swollen nipple. It looked odd to him, in particular when his chest had barely grown at all, and rather looked vaguely swollen, but it still seemed to be enough for the little preemie as she reached out a tiny, pink hand, grasping weakly and clumsily at his chest with both her hand and mouth, but not latching on.

Harry felt his shoulders slump, worry eclipsing his joy, but when he glanced up at White, she did not appear overly concerned.

“Give her a moment, Harry,” White said consolingly. “She may not yet understand what to do. Be patient. Try stroking her cheek. This may help her understand to latch on.”

Harry nodded, shifting his grip carefully before he reached out to touch her tiny cheek, and after she let out a tiny, raspy whine, perhaps in frustration, she at last seemed to get the hang of it as she latched onto his chest and began to suckle.

Harry smiled, his stress dissipating as quickly as it had come. Next to him, he heard a small, reverent sigh as Remus looked on. When he glanced up, he saw that Remus was holding a camera, and he grinned sheepishly as the click sounded in the room, though blessedly Remus had been thoughtful enough to keep the flash off—perhaps he had known that such a bright light would startle the baby.

Assuming, that is, she could see it.

Harry's gaze dropped back to his daughter, his worry over her sight returning. He watched as she alternated between suckling and taking a little gasp of breath, apparently having not completely mastered the ability to breathe while she ate.

Such a thing worried Harry, but for the moment he could not bring himself to speak on it, too enraptured by watching Abigail have her first meal. When she'd finished, there would be time enough to ask White about it.

Abigail did not eat for very long, and took one final gasp around Harry's nipple when she seemed to be finished. Harry pulled her away, only to realize that he had *no clue* how to burp her without hurting her.

Thankfully, White seemed to know what the problem was.

“Place her at your shoulder, and rub her back in gentle, firm strokes,” White said as she approached them. “Would you like me to show you?”

“Please,” Harry replied with a relieved sigh. “I don't want to hurt her.”

White nodded, carefully manipulating Harry's hold on the baby until Abigail was supported against Harry's chest and facing his shoulder, her tiny head resting against it, while one of Harry's hands supported her bottom, and the other was at her back. White pressed Harry's hand down against the baby's back, rubbing up and down in gentle but firm strokes, until after a moment she let out a tiny, milky burp.

“There's my girl,” Harry cooed as White stepped back, and he glanced up at her to offer the healer a smile of thanks. He shifted his hold again in order to cradle the baby gently, not quite willing to let her go just yet, though he did shift his gaze to White as he asked, “it looked like she was having trouble breathing while she ate...what do we do about that?”

“It takes even some term babies a little bit of time to get the hang of breathing and eating at the same time,” she explained patiently. “The fact that she stopped to breathe is a very good sign, and the fact that she suckled on her own is also very positive, Harry. Some preemies develop a case of oral aversion—that is to say, the dislike of having things in their mouth due to feeding or breathing tubes, and I would say it's very lucky that she does not seem to have any issue with it. She's very resilient, like her parents.”

Harry smiled, flushing at the compliment, and Remus chuckled as he shifted a little closer to Harry, reminding him of his alpha's presence at his side.

“Er...d'you wanna hold her?” Harry asked, glancing to White to ensure that this was all right, and she nodded encouragingly.

“Mind her IV, but yes, he may hold her. All the sterilization charms are still in place.”

Remus seemed to positively beam at this, and tears came to his eyes as Harry carefully handed the baby over.

Remus cradled his daughter carefully, letting out a soft coo as he gazed at her, and lurched forward a little as though he'd intended to kiss her on the head, but thought better of it at the last moment, perhaps worrying of inadvertently giving her some kind of an infection with his saliva. She looked even smaller when held in Remus's arms, and he dabbed at his eyes several times as he held her, visibly in awe of the tiny life he held.

“I can't wait for you to come home, little one,” Remus whispered softly, making Harry smile. “I can't wait for our lives to come together again, as they should have from the start. I know now that you really will be all right, especially with your papa watching over you like a mother bear...”

Harry huffed a laugh at the comparison, but did not protest it. After all, it was true.

The hardest moment of the day was returning Abigail to her incubator, albeit without the feeding tube, which thrilled Harry to no end, and it was explained that the strengthening serum that had been in the formula would now be administered by IV, assuming she was able

to continue breastfeeding in the coming days without issue. He was shown which sterilization charms to use when it was time for a feed, and how to seal her in her incubator afterwards. An additional spell was added to the incubator, which would beep loudly when Abigail was hungry, should Harry not hear her soft cries if he was asleep.

White left them alone after she had Harry practice all the spells a few times, only leaving him when she was confident that he had mastered them.

Remus lay on the bed with Harry, holding him, both of their gazes trained on their daughter, who seemed much more comfortable without the feeding tube present. Remus was spooned at Harry's back, holding him close, and for a moment, Harry felt almost like he was home again.

Soon, my love, Harry thought as he gazed at his daughter, and shifted in order to lace his fingers with Remus's. *Soon you can come home*.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: For my American readers, 1500g is a little over 3lbs.

Hard Truths

Chapter Notes

A/N: Next update is scheduled for October 22nd. Enjoy!

Content Warning: Parent-Child Separation Anxiety, General Anxiety

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Chapter Twenty-Six – Hard Truth

They were back again, and Harry almost wanted to snarl at them like he was some sort of wild animal.

He glared over the tiny bundle in his arms. Abigail had just finished her mid-morning feed, and was dozing contentedly in Harry's arms. She was now at thirty-six weeks, and had just one month to go before she would be allowed to leave the hospital, barring any sort of new complication. It had been confirmed the week before that she'd grow up legally blind, but she might be able to see shapes or colours as she grew. Though it was eleven years early, he knew that Remus was already exchanging owls with McGonagall, trying to work out if it would be even *possible* for Abigail to attend Hogwarts when the time came.

Neither Harry nor Remus wanted to dwell on the fact that she might be unable to attend, and Remus had sworn up and down that he'd personally rewrite all the school books she'd need in Braille if he had to.

However, that particular element of Abigail's complicated life was not his present concern—it was that of the two healers in the room with him, both looking frustrated and sympathetic at the same time.

“Harry, please be reasonable,” Hermione began, his hands lifted in front of her as though she was trying to coax a cat out of a tree. “You're *exhausted*. You haven't gone home in over two months. You're running on fumes. We can take care of Abigail perfectly well; you don't need to be here twenty-four hours a day. You need to rest, you need to see your husband and your son. You need to take a breather before you fall apart. You can't be everything she needs if you're too exhausted to function.”

“I'm *fine*,” Harry ground out, his arms tensing around his baby. “I don't need to go anywhere. I need to be *here*.”

“Harry, that's exactly the problem,” White insisted in a similarly soothing tone to the one Hermione was using. “The charms and implements are more helpful to Abigail right now

than anything else. What she really needs is her parents whole and well so that when she is ready to come home, you, in turn, are ready to receive her.”

“What are you trying to say?” Harry demanded angrily, causing Hermione to jump, though White remained impassive. “That some...some... *magic spell* is somehow better for her than her own bloody... *parent* ? How *dare* you!”

Abigail let out a soft, wheezy whine at the noise, cutting Harry's anger short as he cooed at her softly, bringing her to his shoulder and rocking her, hushing the tiny baby as best he could, while he continued to glare at the pair of healers over Abigail's shoulder.

Hermione gazed at White helplessly. White waited, her arms crossed, as she gazed at Harry with a calm and calculative look, as though she could hear more than just what Harry was saying.

“Harry, we are not trying to imply that the magical implements, potions, or enchantments we are using for Abigail's health are better for her than the love and devotion you have shown her since you woke up in hospital back in October,” White began, her tone even, but gentle. “In fact, skin-to-skin contact is one of the *best* things one can give a newborn, and there are many studies that have been done to demonstrate all the benefits of holding your child and caring for them as diligently as you have done.

“ *However* ,” White continued, stopping Harry's relief that they might finally leave short, and he faltered, his frown returning. “Driving yourself into the ground is as damaging to her as any other form of stress or discord. In fact, over-exhaustion to the degree that you have driven yourself has shown to have *detrimental* effects upon the neurological development of a newborn. By that, I mean it could contribute to learning delays, attachment disorders...the list goes on.”

“Harry, please, listen to them,” a third voice chimed in, and when Harry looked up, he felt his heart constrict when he saw Remus standing there, though Harry hadn't heard him come in. “We all understand that you love our daughter. I do too. She is...perfect, and I love her as much as you do, but you have another child at home who misses you dearly, and you cannot be all that you want to be for either of them if you continue you hurt yourself like this. You need a break, love—you *need* to come home.”

“I—I...” Harry began, his voice breaking a little as he gazed at his friend, his healer, and his lover. “She *needs* me. To...to...feed her.”

“We have bottles of milk available, or we can re-insert her feeding tube,” White replied in the same gentle tone as before. “And as soon as the usual visiting hours start, you can come back, Harry. As we have said—we are not trying to take your child away from you, but it would be remiss of me to not ensure that you are also taking care of yourself in the process.”

Harry didn't answer, and instead continued to hug his daughter close. His throat felt tight, and he knew that he was shaking slightly, but Abigail did not seem bothered by it, letting out a little coo as she grasped clumsily at one of the loose threads of his jumper.

Remus, apparently sensing Harry's inner conflict, whispered something to Hermione and White, though Harry was too far to catch it. They left without protest, and Remus waited by the door, presumably to ensure that they had indeed left before he stepped forward, and sat down on the edge of the bed nearest to Harry.

“Love, do you remember when you first came home from... *then* ...and Teddy was struggling with separation anxiety about leaving your side?” Remus said gently as he laid a hand on Harry's knee. He almost wanted to flinch away from his alpha, but Harry easily recognized that his reasons for doing so were petty, given that he was only upset with Remus because he was right.

He needed to go home, even though he *really* didn't want to.

“Yeah,” Harry hedged at last, “I remember.”

“And did we *allow* him to go on with his anxiety, and enable him to continue using your presence as a mental crutch, or did we help him, regardless how hard it was to make that decision?” Remus asked, reaching out while he spoke, and he gently touched Harry's cheek. Harry leant into the contact, and Remus smiled at him sadly.

“You know that the best thing for Abigail right now is to let the healers care for her, and in turn, care for yourself by coming home with me, just for a little while. Abigail will still be here when you come back tomorrow. We both know that. She has been doing so well overall, gaining weight faster than even Healer White anticipated. She is *almost* out of the woods, and you and I both know she will not give up now. Be good to yourself Harry, and come home for some proper, well-deserved rest.”

“I don't know if I can,” Harry whispered, his eyes again falling to Abigail. She was gazing up at him sightlessly, seeming to know where he was, but could not focus on him. It was the only small, telltale sign of her blindness. Had it not been for Harry's knowledge of it, her baby-blue eyes looked entirely normal. “I'm just so scared something will happen when I'm not here...”

“Just as Teddy feared what might happened if he could not see you,” Remus murmured as he continued to gently stroke Harry's cheek. “I just do not want to see you hurt yourself, Harry. I love you, and the healers here know what they are doing. They will keep her safe—you know that they will.”

“I know,” Harry whispered, his voice beginning to break. He did not even have the strength to feel embarrassment at his tears. His breath whipped into his lungs in sharp little bursts, and Remus, silent and reassuring, shifted until he sat alongside Harry, holding him close while he clung to his daughter and wept.

It was several hours before Harry felt ready to go home. Abigail fussed a little when he set her into her incubator, and Harry shivered, longing to hold her again. Remus rocked him and let his omega cry, perhaps understanding how hard this must be for him. He never protested or banished Harry's words. He silently passed Harry a handkerchief, and kissed his temple.

"She'll be okay," Harry whispered, his voice like cracked glass on the precipice of shattering. He didn't know if he was speaking to himself, or to Remus. "She'll be okay."

"Yes, Harry, she will," Remus murmured, petting his hair in gentle strokes before he moved in to kiss him tenderly. "She will be just fine. She's strong—like you."

"I don't feel that strong," Harry admitted with a weak laugh, and Remus chuckled warmly.

"It doesn't matter," Remus said gently, and pressed a kiss to Harry's hair. "You still are."

~*~

It took far longer than Harry would have liked to actually *leave* the hospital. He kept rushing back to check on Abigail, and Remus pointedly suggested that maybe returning to sessions with Robert might be a very good idea.

To this, Harry had agreed readily, but it still did not help him with his present predicament, and Harry tried to joke that maybe it would have been easier if Remus just knocked him out.

"You know I'm not going to do that, Harry," Remus said, clearly not appreciating the ill-timed remark. "You can do this. I know you're afraid, but you *can* do what Abigail needs you to do. You haven't abandoned her. You are just going to take a rest, then you can come back and see her tomorrow. She will be just fine, and you know if anything arises—anything at all—Healer White will contact us immediately."

"Okay," Harry whispered, his head bowed a little. Maybe it would be easier if he didn't look at his daughter anymore. "I...o-okay."

Remus seemed to understand Harry's sentiment behind the jumbled words, and slowly he led Harry out of the hospital door, out of the ward, then at last, the hospital itself.

~*~

"Papa, Papa, Papa, Papa, *Papa!*"

Teddy let out an excited squeal as he burst from the house and all but tackled Harry, who let out a grunt as he fell back into Remus, and the trio fell into the thin layer of snow that coated

the ground.

“Daddy, Santa did it!” Teddy said excitedly as he sat astride his parents, smiling happily, while Andromeda stood at the door, her arms crossed and a smile on her face as she regarded them. Without a word, she stepped back inside, lifting her hand in a vague sort of farewell while Teddy continued to gibber. “You said he would, and he *did! Early even!*”

“Though I am *very* curious about why Teddy is speaking in tongues, can we go in first?” Harry asked between chuckles. “It’s *freezing* .”

“Papa, don't you know what day it is?” Teddy asked as he got up, and watched as his parents climbed to their feet. “It's Christmas Eve!”

“Good Lord, is it?” Harry asked as he got up, blinking at both his mate and son. “I...forgot.”

“It's okay, Papa,” Teddy said, hastening forward to grab Harry's hand once he was vertical again, and he began to drag him towards the house. “Daddy said you forgot because you was so worried about Abigail, but I asked Santa if you could come home for Christmas, even if it was only one day. I don't even mind if there's no presents.”

“I can't believe I forgot, Teddy, I'm so sorry,” Harry said, his voice a little dazed and vacant as he followed the tot's lead into the house, which had been beautifully decorated with garlands and wreaths, as well as a thick, immaculately decorated tree in the sitting room. The scents of the season pervaded every part of the house, and Harry could smell something wonderful emanating from the kitchen. Even little Bastet was dressed up for the holiday, the nearly year-old cat bearing a collar decorated with a sprig of holly and a little bell that jingled as she moved, mewling and purring as she wove her way through Harry's legs in greeting.

“It's okay, Papa,” Teddy said again with a warm smile, in spite of the fact that it was most certainly *not* okay. How could he have done this to Remus and Teddy? Disregarded them so completely at this time of year?

He'd been so terrible to them, and yet, here they were, welcoming and embracing him as though nothing had changed.

Harry glanced down at Teddy, and the little boy beamed at him, letting out a sweet giggle when Harry ran his hand through his hair. He wanted to apologize again, but what would that accomplish, really, except make him feel even more guilty about what had happened?

“I just...” Harry paused, and forced a soft laugh. “I wish Abigail was here with us.”

“She's where she needs to be, that's what Daddy always says,” Teddy said cheerfully. “I asked Santa to make sure she gets better so that she can come home, and Santa never breaks his promises.”

“You're right, Ted,” Harry agreed with a weak laugh. “He doesn't.”

“I broke my promise,” Harry said, staring down into his glass of mulled wine miserably.

Remus turned from the cooker, and blinked at Harry. Teddy was on the sofa, fast asleep, perhaps exhausted by all the excitement of Harry coming home. He was hugging his toy bear close, and a half-finished mug of cocoa sat on the coffee table.

“What promise?” Remus asked, turning back to check the steaming sprouts, and Harry sighed again.

“My promise to Teddy,” Harry explained, pausing long enough to take a healthy gulp of the wine. “Back when I came home from... *then* ...I promised I'd never leave again, and...I did.”

“Oh, Harry,” Remus said, his voice escaping him as a sad sort of sigh. He flicked his wand, casting a stasis charm over the bubbling pots and pans before he moved over to Harry, gently pried the glass of wine from his hand and set it aside, then he enveloped Harry in a tight hug.

“This isn't like before, Harry,” Remus whispered as he moved in to kiss Harry gently on the lips. “You didn't disappear with no explanation. Teddy was able to visit you almost daily—he knew where you were, and he understood that you were doing a *very important job* of taking care of his little sister. You didn't break your promise, Harry.”

“I still feel like I did,” Harry muttered, pressing closer to Remus as he did so, and his alpha chuckled warmly, a hand moving up his back in order to pet his hair gently, reassuringly. “I really cocked this all up, haven't I?”

“It's hard to juggle things sometimes,” Remus said, his arms tightening around Harry a little as he spoke. “Before all this began, your only true responsibility was to your work as a trainee healer. Then, quite suddenly, you had a partner and two children. Abigail's birth was far from an easy, trouble-free experience, and no one blames you for how protective you became of her, nor how you felt that you needed to be with her every moment. Considering everything that has happened, even Teddy understood it, in more simple terms, mind you, but he still understands.”

“Before everything happened, I had plans to finally tell Pomfrey that I wanted to come work with her at Hogwarts after the baby came,” Harry said. “I mean...I never thought it or said it in so many words, but the offer was just... *there* , at the back of my mind, and even without saying anything, I just always felt like I'd agree to it eventually, once things calmed down, but now I don't know if I can...”

“Because of Abigail?”

Meekly, Harry nodded.

Instead of responding straightaway, Remus moved one hand to Harry's chin, cradling it gently for a moment before he pressed a soft kiss to Harry's lips, one which Harry was happy to return. He let out a little whine when Remus began to pull back, causing the older man to

chuckle warmly as he moved in to kiss Harry again, drawing it out longer this time, and allowing Harry his moment before he reluctantly pulled back, and began to speak.

“Harry, Abigail will not always need you as desperately as she does right now,” Remus explained in a soft, patient tone of voice. “Her blindness does not equate to some sort of inability to never be without her parents. She will grow up, she will learn independence, and you can regain your life beyond just our children. There is no reason that you need to force yourself to stay at home if you really want to take Poppy up on her offer—I work from home regardless, so there is no worry that she will be alone as she grows older. I will be here for her as much as you will be.”

“I know she'll be okay,” Harry said as he pressed close to Remus, bathing in his scent. Remus held onto him just as tightly, speaking without words to how desperately he had missed Harry over these last two months. “I don't think she'll be unable to take care of herself because of her blindness. There's braille, and spells to make a book read itself, and I even read that the wizarding world has service dogs, so I know she'll be okay. I just...worry. She's so little, and the world is so big.”

“She'll be okay, Harry,” Remus murmured, kissing him again. “I know it doesn't feel like it right now, but she *will be* .”

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I just want to make sure it's absolutely clear that the intended message with this chapter was that Harry was exhausting himself, which eventually would lead to a mental shut down, thus making it difficult for Harry to care for Abigail properly. I am not in any way trying to say that separation of the birth parent and child is in any way better or beneficial to the child, and under normal circumstances could have the opposite effect. However, I, my beta, and my various parental sounding boards all agreed with me on what I was trying to portray here, and I hope it comes off as I intended. Thank you for reading!

Coming Home

Chapter Notes

A/N: Next update is scheduled for November 5th. Enjoy!

Note: Going into November, I will be participating in NaNoWriMo, or National Novel Writing Month. While this rarely impacts my fanfic work, I thought I'd give you guys a heads up in case I fail at keeping it all straight, so to speak :P This year I'm hoping to complete my original ABO novel, which you can learn more about on my fanfic, craft, and writing blog on Tumblr under the same username, Jbankai89.

Chapter Twenty-Seven – Coming Home

Harry couldn't believe it.

It had been months— *months* of not knowing, of waiting, and of watching.

And now, January twenty-seventh had come. Paired with it had been the news Harry had been agonizing to hear.

“ *Abigail can go home.* ”

Harry had never been the weepy type, something he had always prided himself in, but in that moment, he *did* cry.

A whole ocean's worth—and he didn't care.

His baby girl was *finally* coming home.

Even Remus had wept at this news, and the couple had hugged enthusiastically, weeping in each other's arms. Little Teddy had looked on, utterly bewildered by his parents' reaction, and had demanded, almost indignantly, why they were so upset that his baby sister was coming home.

That night, Harry had been too excited to sleep—even after he and Remus had celebrated with a vigorous round of love-making. When they finished, Remus held him, nosing his mating mark like a happy puppy, and Harry's joyous tears blended with his sweat. His gaze fell to the empty white bassinet that had been set up next to their bed.

Soon, baby, he thought, soon you'll be home.

~*~

The next day, Harry went alone to the hospital to pick Abigail up. Remus had said something about getting things organized at home, and Harry didn't press the issue. On today of all days, he didn't want to spoil Abigail's homecoming with an argument.

Still, Harry felt a little hurt as he Apparated to the hospital alone that morning, hopefully for the last time.

“Good morning, Harry,” Healer White said as he all but skipped into the NICU wing, “it's good to see you in such high spirits.”

“Just excited to take Abigail home,” Harry replied, his smile widening to a grin when White chuckled warmly at his enthusiasm.

“And I agree, it is high time for little Abigail to go home,” White replied. “I would just like to have you come to my office first. There are a few things I would like to go over with you, and some information packets I'd like you to hold on to.”

“Lead the way,” Harry replied, smiling as White nodded, and together they headed towards her office.

As they walked, Harry could not help but marvel at how well the last month had gone. He was better rested, much more calm, and far less anxious about Abigail's well-being. Her lungs now appeared to be fully developed, but the healers did warn that there was every chance that she would develop asthma as she got older.

Harry wasn't too worried about that—asthma in the wizarding world was something entirely treatable, despite that fact that it was not presently curable. When he'd worked at St Mungo's, he had worked with a few patients who would come in once every six months for what they called A Respiration Serum Chamber Treatment, or RSCT for short. They would inhale the steam of the potion for at least two hours, and be able to go home without any sort of lung issue at all—a far more comfortable treatment than relying on an inhaler for daily breathing issues within the muggle world.

The blindness was another problem, one which Harry admittedly still struggled with, but less so since his talk with Remus over Christmas. He knew he did not love his daughter any less because of it, but he still worried—what might her life look like, so to speak, if she was blind? Would she be able to go to Hogwarts? Get a job like everyone else? Have a happy life?

Harry almost hated himself for feeling that way. Of *course* she could be happy and have a disability, but his nervous, anxious state of mind did not help to assuage his worries.

The pair stopped outside of an office door that read *Healer Pilar White*. The pause in their trek drew Harry from his thoughts, and he watched White wave her wand at the door before she opened it, and motioned for Harry to come inside.

“Have a seat, Harry,” White said as she circled her desk, and fetched a stack of leaflets and papers from on top of one of her filing cabinets. Harry sat, and watched her ease down across from him, then offered him the stack of paperwork she held. When Harry looked down at it, he saw that the top leaflet read, *Understanding Your Blind Baby* .

“Harry, the first thing that I'd like to discuss is that though little Abigail has been given a clean bill of health—she hasn't had any breathing difficulties, she has been bottle-feeding very well, and she is able to maintain her own body temperature as well as is generally expected for a newborn at her age. However, I would still advise that everyone maintain a decent level of cleanliness around her,” White began, steepling her fingers as she gazed across at him. “Her immune system will not be as strong as that of a normal baby, and that means bathing her regularly as you would with a normal child, but also keeping her space clean and washing your hands before you or anyone else holds her—especially your other little one. Children can carry a lot of diseases from playing outdoors and things like that, so I would advise that he make sure he is nice and clean before he holds her. It's merely precautionary however—we don't want to have Abigail back for a complication.”

Harry laughed a little at her tone, and White smiled.

“No,” Harry agreed, “I definitely don't want to see her back here for a good while.”

“Now,” White continued, “her breathing—given that she has not had any apnea episodes since her first few weeks with us I find that to be less of a concern, but I would advice keeping a close eye on her breathing, especially when she is sleeping, at least for the first few nights, at least.”

“All right,” Harry agreed, and he knew that even without the mention of watching her breathing, he was fairly certain he'd be on the side of neurotic about it until Abigail was at least a little bit older. “Has she been given her newborn potions now that she's at forty weeks?”

“Yes, they were administered earlier this morning, along with flu inoculation and one for other infant respiratory diseases, just to be on the safe side,” White replied. “No side effects; she took them very well. We also took a little blood to test her for her secondary sex designation, and we are waiting on the results, which we'll deliver by owl post, about a fortnight from now.”

“Good,” Harry said as he offered White a smile. “And what about her...blindness? What do I need to know?”

“It's all in the paperwork I gave you, but in short it will not adversely affect her going forward,” White explained as she smiled at him reassuringly. “The womb is dark, and the real world is still dark. To her, she will not know the difference in terms of her lack of sight. However, she will become quite sound-sensitive, touch-sensitive, and scent-sensitive, and often blind babies develop better proprioception than their sighted counterparts—that is, her awareness of her body in space. That means that her primary means to know you will be sound, scent, and touch. If the test results indicate that she is alpha or omega, her need for scent reassurance will be that much stronger. Just do everything you have already been doing—make sure she knows you're there before you touch her, use your voice, let her touch you, use aurally or physically stimulating toys as she grows...that sort of thing. It may be difficult to remember at first, but after a while it will become second nature to you and the rest of your family.”

“So in sum, treat her like a normal baby, but with more sound and touch?” Harry asked, and White smiled.

“Exactly,” she replied. “In fact, treating her as though she is somehow *other* will not be helpful as she grows older. She is her own normal—her lack of sight does not change that. If you are concerned about her learning mobility as she grows, such as hurting herself by walking into things there are tips in the paperwork I gave you, but nothing you need to worry about at the present.”

“All right, I can do that,” Harry replied as he hugged the papers to his chest. “I don't want her to feel like a freak.”

~*~

Preparing to leave following their conversation took surprisingly very little time. White offered Harry a little bag to carry the paperwork in, freeing up his arms in order to comfortably carry little Abigail home.

Given that it was January, little Abigail, now slightly past the average weight of a term newborn, was bundled up in a little green baby onesie far thicker than an average one, which was geared to stave off the winter chill. A little white hat had been tucked over her tiny tuft of sandy blond hair, which Harry supposed she had gotten from Remus, while her bright blue eyes still bore that newborn hue.

“Hey, sweetheart,” Harry said as he stepped into the room, and Abigail let out a happy little coo at the sound of his voice, which made Harry smile. When he reached the side of her incubator he touched her hand, then her cheek in order for her to know that he was there before he carefully scooped her up for what he hoped was the last time, and hugged her close. Compared to when he'd first held her, she was positively *heavy* now, something that made Harry brim with happiness. “Ready to go home, love? Daddy and your big brother are just *dying* to see you.”

Harry propped his daughter against his shoulder, and he felt her snuffle gently against his neck, scenting him quite enthusiastically, which caused him to smile somewhat sadly. The reaction made Harry think that it may be more likely for her to be alpha or omega, and considering how the laws were at the moment, he prayed most fervently for the former.

“Come on, sweetheart,” Harry whispered to her as he fought to drag himself out of his dark thoughts. “Let's go home.”

~*~

That day, Harry learnt that baby-safe Portkeys were quite literally the *greatest* way to travel.

It moved more slowly than a regular Portkey would, and took the form of a cute little stuffed bear. When they landed, Harry was set down gently on his feet, rather than in a confused heap, and Harry immediately offered the little bear to his daughter, who pawed at it curiously, though she didn't quite know what to make of it, especially with all the new smells around her. Little Abigail's nostrils were wide, and she was quiet, her tiny head cocked to the side slightly, listening intently to her surroundings.

“We're home, love,” Harry murmured to her, grinning broadly as he said it, his eyes on the balloons tied to the lamppost outside of their house, and he spotted Teddy pressing his face against the sitting room window, and bearing a big smile. “Come on, I think a few people are excited to see you.”

Harry moved up the walkway, little Abigail clutched tightly in his arms. She was fidgeting a little, but as far as Harry could tell, not from any sort of true discomfort.

“I bet the cold air isn't so nice, eh?” Harry murmured to her as he stopped at the door. “Just one more moment, love, we're almost there...”

Harry shifted his hold on his daughter in order to manoeuvre the door open, and when it swung inward, he was met with a gentle sort of applause, and five smiling faces gazing upon him.

In addition, a beautiful silver banner had been strung up along the wall that read, *Welcome Home Abigail*. The ceiling had been adorned with balloons and streamers, and the dining room table was heavily laden with food.

Remus moved forward first, perhaps after sensing that Harry was too stunned to speak. Andromeda smiled, Teddy hopped up and down a few times, while Hermione leant against Ron side, and dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief.

“I...I don't know what to say,” Harry stuttered out as he gazed up at Remus. “Did you plan all this? Is that why you didn't want to come to the hospital?”

“It would be remiss of me to not give credit to my co-conspirators,” Remus replied with a warm smile as he motioned to everyone else in the room. When Harry laughed, they all smiled.

“I picked the b'loons!” Teddy piped up excitedly as he at last lost the battle with keeping himself calm, and he raced over to hug Harry around the waist. “And the streamies! It's all for the baby! Does she like it?”

Teddy asked all of his questions very fast, while Abigail, like before, was very quiet, listening quite intently to everything around her.

“Yeah, Ted,” Harry replied, not having the heart to explain to the boy that his baby sister couldn't see the decorations, “she likes it.”

~*~

Harry slipped into the master bedroom with Abigail, changing her into less stifling clothing, and he spoke to her the entire time, making sure she knew that he was there. His little shadow in the form of Teddy stood not far behind, watching curiously, with his bear hugged to his chest. Abigail's new Portkey-Bear had been set aside, though Harry hadn't the heart to throw it away.

“Papa?” Teddy asked once Harry had finished and had Abigail in his arms again, and he turned towards his son.

“Yeah, Ted?”

“How come you talked so much while you changed Abigail's clothes? Doesn't she know that you were just giving her inside clothes?”

“Well, Ted, do you remember when Daddy and I explained to you that Abigail was born blind?” Teddy nodded. “Well, that means that her eyes don't work. She can't see anything, so she needs to use her ears and nose and hands to figure out who is with her. I talked a lot so that she knows it was me, and not a stranger. Also, up 'til now she had a *lot* of healers poking at her. It wasn't fun for her, but it was to make her better. I talked a lot so she knew that she was home, and I was just to changing her clothes, and it wasn't some sort of medical...thing.”

“Oh.” Teddy paused, and bit his lip. “When will she be better?”

“Well...” Harry hesitated as he tried to think of the least emotionally upsetting way to phrase it. “She'll never be able to see stuff like you and me, Ted, but the healer thinks that she might be able to see shapes and colours as she grows up. It's not bad, love, it's just how she is. She's not sad about it, so we shouldn't be either.”

“Will she be scared of the dark if she can't see anything?”

“No,” Harry replied, and offered Teddy a reassuring smile. “See how she is right now? All quiet, and making that cooing noise? That's a happy baby right there. If she was scared, she'd be crying.”

“Okay, as long as she's not scared,” Teddy said as his little body seemed to relax, and he smiled a little. “I want her to get better, but if she doesn't that's okay too. I still love my sister, Papa.”

“Yeah,” Harry agreed, “I do too.”

The trio made it back into the sitting room where everyone was assembled in a semicircle, drinks set upon the coffee table, while they all gazed at Harry expectantly.

“All hands washed?” Harry asked them, arching a brow, and Hermione was the first to laugh.

“And thoroughly disinfected, I made sure of it,” she added. “Teddy, did you wash your hands too? If you didn't, you won't get a turn.”

“A turn with what?”

“*Holding the baby*.”

Teddy's eyes bulged, his little hands clapped to his cheeks with excitement, and he zipped out of the room.

“Someone please go and supervise him,” Harry said as he carried Abigail over to Andromeda. “I don't want the poor kid to get himself soaked again.”

“Duty calls,” Remus filled in, chuckling as he stood up, and he waved Harry off when he paused in front of the matriarch of their little group. “Go on, Harry. I know that Andromeda is *dying* to hold her granddaughter.”

“All right,” Harry agreed with a laugh, pausing just long enough to watch Remus disappear down the hall after their son, then at last turned his attention back to Andromeda.

“So, just talk as you hold her,” Harry explained as he held Abigail out to her. “And encourage her to touch you—like your face and things. If she goes suddenly quiet and still don't freak out, she'd just listening.”

“All right,” Andromeda said, and they both laughed when Abigail's mouth opened a little, almost in a gasp, apparently startled by the new voice. “Hello, little love. Don't be nervous, I'm your Gran. I won't hurt you.”

Abigail grizzled a little, but she didn't not appear overly upset by the sound of a new person. Carefully, Harry handed her over, which Abigail did not seem as keen on when she let out a little whine of discontentment, but as Andromeda spoke, Harry chiming in occasionally so that she knew he was there, Abigail calmed, and appeared quite interested in the feel of Andromeda's robes, which she patted at clumsily while Andromeda held her.

“Oh, Harry, she is just so *precious*,” Andromeda cooed as she rocked the little girl. “Hello, sweetheart, yes, I’m your *gran*. There, now, no nervousness. I know I may sound odd compared to your daddies, but I promise I’ll not harm you.”

Andromeda followed Harry's instructions to a T, speaking to her in a sweet sort of babytalk he had never heard from the older woman before. Abigail was staring up at Andromeda, her little eyes wide, the expression almost like she could actually *see* her gran.

But she can, Harry thought, his eyes falling to the way Abigail would go silent from time to time in order to listen, or the way she clumsily touched Andromeda's robes, and the way she sniffed the air. *She can see everything—in her own way.*

Teddy had returned with Remus while Andromeda was having her turn, and Harry continued helping the others have their turns holding her. Each were careful to follow Harry's instructions, and Hermione chattered at Abigail happily, though when Ron's turn came he appeared somewhat at a loss for what to say to the tiny baby in his arms.

“Er...hello, Abigail,” Ron said as he rocked her. “Your dad said I’m supposed to talk so that you know it’s your Uncle Ron, and not some stranger, like if a...a...stranger broke in and is now holding you, but it’s fine, it’s just me...”

Hermione buried her red face in her hands, while Teddy began to giggle.

After Ron had at last finished nervously babbling at the baby, it was Teddy's turn.

When Harry brought Abigail over, Teddy's eyes brightened, and he began to clap his hands together excitedly, which caused Abigail to whine a little at the sudden, unknown noise. Teddy immediately stopped, and his expression fell.

“Papa? Is the baby sad?”

“No, love,” Harry replied with a reassuring smile. “It’s just a new sound to her. She is brand new, remember. You startled her a little, but it’s okay, she’s not sad.”

“Oh, okay,” Teddy replied, though he still appeared a little downtrodden by the news that he’d inadvertently startled his sister. “I’m sorry, Abigail. I didn’t mean it. I won’t clap ever *ever* again.”

“You can clap,” Remus interjected with a warm laugh, leaning in to wrap an arm around his son. “As Papa said—it’s new to her. Sneezing is new to her too. She might startle *herself* with a good sneeze. Try not to be nervous, son, just remember that the world is all new to your sister, and sometimes new sounds might startle her, sometimes she’ll like them. It all takes time.”

“Okay,” Teddy agreed readily, smiling first at Remus, then at Harry. “Can I hold Abby now?”

“Abby?” Harry asked teasingly, and Teddy nodded.

“Everyone needs a nickname, so she’s Abby,” Teddy pronounced, which caused everyone in the room to laugh warmly.

“All right, then, are you ready to hold Abby?” Harry said, and Teddy nodded excitedly.

“Okay, so first you have to make your arms into a cradle, let Daddy help you,” Harry explained, and when Teddy looked to Remus for guidance, the alpha gently manipulated Teddy's arms into the correct shape. “Now, I'm gonna put Abby in your arms. You have to be careful to hold her head up, because she's not as tough as you yet, and needs a little help with that okay?”

“Okay,” Teddy replied, smiling cheerily. “And I have to talk a lot so that Abby knows it's me, right, Papa?”

“Right,” Harry agreed, chuckling warmly as he crouched down, and slowly passed the baby over.

Teddy held Abigail carefully, following every one of Harry's instructions to the letter. Abigail was quiet, listening, while Teddy was momentarily silent, enraptured by his baby sister, before he at last began to speak.

“Hi, Abby,” Teddy said softly. “I'm your big brother, I'm Teddy. I love you.”

Harry felt his throat tighten, and Remus was at his side in an instant. Remus wrapped his arms around Harry, and he leant his head against his mate's shoulder, overwhelmed by Teddy's simple proclamation, but so too was he filled with joy. As he watched Teddy talk to his baby sister, Harry realized something, something that he had an inkling of before, but now he felt it with every part of his being—

His family, at last, was complete.

Complete

Chapter Notes

A/N: Next update is scheduled for November 19th. Sorry for the slight delay!

It is with a heavy heart that I announce that this is the last official chapter of this story. However, there will be an epilogue posted next week, so you guys have that to look forward to before I officially wrap this up :) Thank you everyone for all your support over the course of posting this story. Remus/Harry is one of my favourite pairings, and it always makes me sad how underappreciated it is. I'm so glad its shippers have taken to my stories so well, I really appreciate it. Thank you for all the comments, the kudos, bookmarks, and support. I love you all.

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Chapter Twenty-Eight – Complete

Harry had already known that Remus was a wonderful father.

It was apparent in how he always was with Teddy, and how careful he was when handling little Abigail. He, like Harry, had done the necessary homework, and Remus was likely the one person in the world that Harry did not hover over when his child was being held by them.

Harry had known all this. Even so, when he woke up and spotted Remus pacing and rocking their baby daughter, he was still struck by how utterly *perfect* the scene before him was.

The baby was silent—she was often a quiet baby, even a week after her homecoming, she never really cried, not even when she needed something from her parents.

Harry supposed it had something to do with the fact that she was often listening to her surroundings, and she likely could not do it as well if she was crying loudly. As Remus paced with her, she let out the occasional pleasant coo, which brought a smile to Remus's face. The sight made Harry feel light with happiness.

“She really loves her father,” Harry said softly, which caused Remus to jump a little, as though he hadn't noticed that Harry had woken up. The start was momentary however, and Remus offered Harry a warm smile.

“Her father loves her too,” Remus replied, still smiling as he carried the infant over to the bed and he sat down next to Harry, who was content to remain lying down as he watched Remus. It was still early, and Teddy was not likely to disturb them for at least another hour or so,

giving Harry a little time to rest that morning and not rush out of bed. “I keep wondering what her life will be like growing up, how she'll see the world, so to speak...”

“I've been doing some reading, and there's ways to help her, and to make her feel more independent,” Harry offered, shifting up a little to look over Remus's arm at their daughter. Though her hair was the same shade as Remus's, it often stuck straight up like Harry's did, hinting at her parentage quite clearly. “Things like sight dogs and these sight coordination specialists...they walk with the person to teach them how to travel on their own, like how many steps to a shop and things like that...I thought when it came time for her to go to Hogwarts we could employ one to help her learn how to get to all her lessons. I don't want her to miss out on anything just because of her blindness.”

“You sound much more hopeful than I do at the moment,” Remus mused with a warm chuckle that caused Harry to smile. “I do not think she'll ever be helpless, but I worry...”

“I know, love,” Harry said, finally sitting up in order to kiss Remus on his scruffy cheek, and the alpha turned to plant a tender kiss to his lips. “I worry too, but she's strong, she'll be okay. Just you wait and see.”

~*~

The couple tiptoed downstairs, and upon reaching the kitchen Remus passed Abigail to Harry to nurse her, while Remus started on breakfast.

Harry rocked little Abigail in his arms, smiling as he watched Remus prepare a family favourite—crêpes with clotted cream and fresh strawberries.

It was hardly the season for crêpes—in fact it was snowing quite hard outside, and it appeared as though the weather was turning towards a true blizzard. Harry always viewed strawberries as more of a summer food, and yet the sight of Remus moving about the kitchen, making the batter, preparing the fruit, and filling a teapot with water—it was so heartwarming to see.

I really do love that man, Harry thought, beaming, just as Abigail finished her own breakfast, and Harry brought her to his shoulder in order to burp her.

Teddy toddled downstairs close to an hour later when Remus was putting the last touches on the crêpes, filling them with strawberries and cream, and folding them into triangle-shaped parcels. He topped each plate with another healthy spoonful of cream, and smiled when he spotted his son meandering into the kitchen, his hair sticking up every which way, and still visibly half-asleep.

“Morning, sleepy head,” Harry said teasingly as he set down Abigail in her baby swing, and reached out to pat Teddy's hair. “Looks like Bast might've taken a little nap on your head during the night.”

“Stop it, Papa,” Teddy said, his voice escaping him as both a whine and a laugh before he managed to wiggle out of his adoptive father's clutches, and scampered over to Abigail. “Morning, Abby,” he said, and pecked her on the cheek in a sweet display of sibling affection that made Harry want to *die* from how cute it was. “Did you have good sleeps?”

“I think she did,” Remus said as he stepped over to the table, using his wand to carefully transport the breakfast onto the place settings, and Teddy beamed when he saw what had been prepared. “She already had her breakfast, so you been a good boy and gobble yours all up, all right.”

“Okay, Daddy,” Teddy replied, letting out another whine and giggle as this time Remus reached over, but only to ruffle his hair affectionately.

~*~

Dear Madam Pomfrey,

I'm contacting you about that job you offered me a few months ago—as your trainee healer?

I hope the offer is still on the table, but after you left a lot sort of happened all at once, and I just never really had time to sit back and really give it a good think. Now that I can, I'm hoping you'll be willing to take me up on it...maybe at the start of the school year after next? I only just brought my daughter home last week, and I'd of course understand if you'd be unwilling to hold the position for that long, but if it happens to be open at that time I'd love to take you up on it.

My daughter has a couple complications from her premature birth, including blindness—beyond wanting to learn more about wizards with disabilities, I like the idea of being there for her when she goes to Hogwarts, should something happen.

I do hope it doesn't sound like I am imparting my daughter's tragedy in order to secure the position—that's not my intent, however I do think I would like to focus my healing education on both general healing and healing for wizards with disabilities, especially children and teenagers to help them feel like they're not some kind of freak for being how they are. I feel like Hogwarts might be a good place to do that.

Thank you for your consideration,

Harry Potter

A soft knocking upon the door jolted Harry out of his trance, just as he finished composing the letter, causing him to blot the parchment rather badly. Harry shook his head at his own foolishness, and waved his wand to clean up the mess just as Remus's voice began to sound from the other side of the study door.

“Harry, may I interrupt?” Remus called. “Abigail is getting fussy and I think she might be hungry.”

“Come in!” Harry replied, and smiled when Remus all but leapt into the room, his expression lined with worry and bearing a fussy little Abigail in his arms, who was whining, but not quite crying.

“Oh, sweetheart, are you hungry?” Harry baby-talked, which caused Remus to laugh, even as he handed the infant over. Abigail responded with a needy cry, and Harry unbuttoned his shirt, bringing Abigail to his chest. She latched on the moment she felt the nipple near her mouth, while Harry glanced up, and grinned at Remus. “Super Dad, that's me.”

“How can I *ever* repay you?” Remus asked, a note of teasing sarcasm in his voice, which caused Harry's grin to widen.

“Want to look over my letter to Pomfrey?” Harry asked. “I haven't applied for many jobs and I want to make sure it's all right. Just be careful—the ink's still wet.”

Remus nodded as they switched places, Harry holding the baby securely, while Remus sat down in order to read over the letter. Harry swallowed as he watched him—Remus didn't look particularly impressed by what he was reading.

“Harry...” Remus began as he eased back in the seat a little, making it creak. “Are you certain that you want to send this to Poppy?”

“Is it that bad?” Harry asked as he tried to force out a laugh, but Remus didn't reciprocate it, and he quickly stopped.

“I think you sound too timid in this letter, Harry, and that's not exactly *you*,” Remus explained patiently. “More than that, you sound less like you want this position, and more like you're *afraid* of it. Poppy knows that you aren't available for a while, and stating that you want this job but need to start later is a perfectly reasonable thing to say—be honest on what you need. Skirting around it nervously won't help you here, love.”

“But...” Harry trailed off as he bit his lip. “What if I'm *too* firm, and I lose my chance at the position?”

“I'm not saying to be immovable in your needs, such as telling her *this is the way it must be, and I shall not be swayed*. Tell her what you need, but emphasize that you really want this position and why. If she says it doesn't work, and she intends to fill this position sooner then you can discuss it with her. Obviously bringing Abigail to the hospital wing with you wouldn't be the best idea, given her weakened immune system, but if you truly want this position we can work something out, Harry. We always do.”

Harry smiled, just as Abigail finished eating. He shifted the infant to his shoulder and rubbed her back as he replied, “yeah, okay. I'll redo it.”

Remus smiled warmly in return, standing up and moving over to Harry. They shared a kiss as Abigail let out a little milky burp, then Harry passed the baby over.

“Rewrite the letter, and if you do well...” Remus trailed off, his eyes glinting faintly with true Marauder mischief. “Then maybe I'll have a *treat* for my omega.”

Harry almost moaned aloud at the prospect. It had felt like *ages* since they'd been intimate, and Harry just loved it when Remus slipped out of his careful respect for Harry in order to speak to him in such a deliciously possessive manner.

“Oh, *yes, Alpha*,” Harry cooed, then grinned when a delightful flush coloured Remus's cheeks.

Remus left Harry to it, and in his enthusiasm, after rewriting the letter with Remus's suggestions in mind, he sent the letter off before he could show it to his mate.

Which was, of course, when Remus stepped into the kitchen and spotted Harry banging his head against the counter as he muttered, “*stupid, stupid, stupid...*” over and over.

“Harry?” Remus prompted, making Harry jump a little. “What exactly are you doing?”

“Punishing myself for thinking with my downstairs brain,” Harry replied as he pressed his cheek to the granite counter. “I sent the letter off before I could show it to you...”

This admission did not exactly cause the reaction Harry had been anticipating. He'd hoped for sympathy, or something softer. Maybe some kind of reassurance.

Instead, Remus started to laugh.

It was not the soft chuckle that Harry was used to, but rather a loud, raucous laugh that seemed to make the walls quiver with shared amusement.

“Oh, Harry,” Remus said, still giggling as he slowly came down from his laughing fit. “I do love you, even when you have a momentary mental lapse.”

Remus paused as he stepped forward to draw Harry to him. Harry went willingly in spite of his annoyance at his alpha, and let out a tiny, needy moan when Remus drew him into a heart-stopping kiss.

“I think I trust that you wrote the second draft of your letter beautifully,” Remus purred against his lips. “And I think that earns you a sweet, *sweet* reward. Tonight, I will cast the Ambient Silencing Charm on our Abigail—perhaps you've heard of it? She will hear only ambient sounds of the woods around our home, and the sounds of us sleeping, but not what we're truly up to, but if she needs us, we will hear her. Then I will lovingly divest you of your clothes, and—”

“—*Daddy!*” Teddy shrieked from the other room, which caused Harry to let out a soft, frustrated whine at the interruption, just as Teddy rushed into the room. Harry pressed closer to his mate in order to conceal his obvious excitement from their son, while Remus turned his gaze to the boy.

“Yes, Teddy?” Remus asked mildly, perfectly slipping from his role as Horny Alpha to Father in a seamless fashion that Harry had not yet managed to fully replicate.

“I’m hungry. Can I have a snack please?”

“All right,” Remus replied, chuckling warmly at the four-year-old. “Let me see what we have...”

Remus moved away from Harry, clear reluctance in his every step, and like that their moment was over as they once more assumed their roles as parents.

Harry couldn't say he was particularly disappointed by the shift, but now he didn't think that Teddy's bedtime could in any way come fast enough.

~*~

Harry was still getting the hang of the whole parent-partner-parent mental shift, but he liked to think that he was getting better at it.

The day was spent as so many others, and to Harry's surprise, a Hogwarts owl arrived much sooner than Harry would have expected, especially considering the horrific weather outside.

Its arrival interrupting their shepherd's pie, but no one cared, Remus watching Harry read over Pomfrey's response with hopeful eyes, while Teddy gazed at them in confusion, and Abigail babbled softly in her baby swing.

“Well?” Remus asked when Harry was quiet for too long. “What did she say?”

Instead of answering, Harry smiled and handed the letter over, the words on the parchment now firmly seared into his brain.

Dear Harry,

Of course you may start whenever you like, and I am more than happy to wait for your Maternity Leave to end before you begin your training with me.

I think the notion to work on means to help potential special needs pupils is an excellent idea, one which we can hone over the years. Many parents choose to home-school their children

who have particular needs, given the lack of resources our school possesses—of course, many wizards feel that magic can fix everything, which, as we know, isn't true.

Once we have a plan in place, we can approach the school governors with it. Perhaps implementing ramps for wheelchair-bound students (and Firenze, who cannot manage the stairs), a more broad magical Great Hall for pupils with food sensitivities, access to transcription parchment and quills for students who have hearing difficulties, and, of course, an expansion to our library to include braille books, like for your little one.

It goes well beyond Healing in the strictest sense, Harry. It's very big, but ultimately very doable (perhaps with financial backing from a certain blond friend of yours). If Mr Malfoy can push the idea forward while you and I can focus our attention on any medical needs of our pupils, from garden-variety disasters to students with more chronic illnesses and needs. If the school governors will not listen to them or their parents, we can act as spokespeople for them. As Healers, we luckily gain a certain level of respect from people in those sorts of positions.

I took the liberty of bringing your idea to our Headmaster, and he has our full support. I expect you shall be hearing from Albus soon.

I will be in touch,

Poppy Pomfrey

“Well done, Harry,” Remus said, beaming at him, and Harry flushed as a pleased sort of smile spread over his face.

“What did Papa do, Daddy?” Teddy asked curiously, and Remus smiled at his son warmly.

“Your Papa is going to change the world.”

~*~

Harry went to bed that night far earlier than he normally would have, but all the excitement of the day had utterly exhausted him.

Without any form of encouragement, Remus followed him to the bedroom, a wicked look on his face that made Harry grin. Remus waited until Harry had set Abigail in her bassinet before he climbed onto the bed with his mate, and kissed him. It evolved quickly from a simple peck to something more heated, their tongues intertwining with a feverish need, and Harry moaned into it, arching his body upward, desperate to touch as much of Remus as he could reach.

“I suppose that asking you if you're still *up* for a shag would be a waste at this point,” Remus teased, and Harry laughed.

“As long as you use the Contraception Charm, then we're good,” Harry replied. “I know my heats haven't come back yet, but...”

He trailed off, uncertain what Remus might say, but the older man merely smiled as he moved in to kiss Harry again.

“When you got pregnant with Abigail, you showed no outward signs of a heat cycle, likely due to stress. Normally it only takes about a month for heat symptoms to come back after birth, but you have been under a lot of stress, so it might take longer. I understand your caution however, and asking for me to use the Contraception Charm is not what I would consider an outlandish request.”

“I knew there was a reason I loved you,” Harry murmured, causing Remus to chuckle warmly before he waved his wand, first at Abigail's bassinet, then at the door (ensuring that Teddy would not accidentally hear anything untoward), then at last at his own groin.

Harry eased back on the bed as he watched, smiling very much like a cat with a bowl of cream, and he tilted his head to the side, showing off his mark for Remus to see.

The alpha's eyes seemed to almost glow at the display, and Remus breathed deeply as he set aside his wand and crawled across the duvet, blanketing Harry with his body as they kissed again.

Slowly, the pair divested themselves of their clothing. Harry peeled off Remus's jumper, then flicked open his shirt buttons one by one, trembling with delight as each patch of skin was exposed to him. Remus smiled indulgently as he watched Harry work, almost as though he was more pleased by Harry's enjoyment of the act than anything else.

When Remus's upper clothing was off, he returned the favour, gently peeling Harry out of his jumper and T-shirt, and pressed a kiss to Harry's mostly flat belly, making the omega laugh.

“Stop,” Harry protested, despite the fact that he barely meant it. “That's my baby fat. It hasn't gone away yet.”

“It's what remains of Abigail,” Remus replied before he kissed Harry's stomach again. “Which means it's beautiful—*you're* beautiful, Harry.”

Harry flushed, not quite certain what to say to that. Remus did not seem keen to await an answer however, and moved on to the fastenings on Harry's jeans.

Harry would have liked for Remus to yank the garment off quickly so that they could get on with it, but the alpha appeared keen to take his time. He peeled Harry out of his jeans slowly, exposing his legs inch by inch, and he let out a soft gasp, as though he was seeing Harry's naked body for the very first time.

Remus's reverence brought a delicate flush to Harry's cheeks, but he was present enough to realize that interrupting would utterly ruin the moment. Instead he stayed quiet, that is, until Remus moved in to press a gentle kiss to Harry's right inner thigh, the action causing Remus's facial hair to tickle the sensitive skin, making the omega twitch and giggle.

Remus left Harry's pants in place, easing back a little to allow Harry to return the favour, divesting Remus of his trousers, and as usual the alpha had opted out of undergarments, which thus caused his erection jut forward immediately, making Harry grin. He'd almost forgotten how big it was.

Harry hastily peeled Remus the rest of the way out of his trousers. Harry could feel his own arse leaking slick, like it was begging to be filled, but first Harry wanted to taste Remus—he *needed* to taste him.

Harry began with a soft kiss near the base of the shaft, making Remus hiss. His breath stuttered out of his lungs as Harry extended his tongue, licking his way up until he reached the head of Remus's cock. He popped into his mouth like a lolly, and stared up at Remus while he suckled.

Remus was breathing deeply, soft little whimpers slipping past his lips as Harry sucked him. He placed a gentle hand to the back of the omega's neck, encouraging, but never forcing.

Harry continued to tease Remus's cock, but stopped when the alpha's breath began to hitch, as though he had begun to inch towards climax, but was not very close—yet. Remus let out a frustrated whine, which Harry answered with a grin as he straightened up in order to kiss Remus again.

“I don't want you to cum until you're *deep* inside me,” Harry breathed against his lips. “I am so wet for you, love,” he continued as he grabbed Remus's wrist, and guided it to his arse, “see?”

Remus probed at his pants-covered arse, making Harry hiss with pleasure. Harry tilted his head back, breathing hard, and he moaned again when he felt Remus's teeth and tongue lave over his mating mark, sending bolts to his groin with every touch.

As they sat there, Remus guided Harry to the centre of the bed, never easing up on the touches, until Harry, too, was a panting, needy mess.

“Want me to take these off for you, my omega?” Remus breathed into his ear as he teased the elastic waistband of Harry's pants, and he whined as he nodded. “That's not an answer, love. Do you want me to take these off?”

Remus's almost authoritarian tone was both deeply arousing as well as *deeply* frustrating. Harry just wanted to get on with it, and yet Remus appeared quite content to tease him until he truly lost his mind.

“P-Please, my alpha. Please take them off...” Harry choked out, still breathing hard, and he saw Remus smirk as he grabbed hold of the waistband, and slowly peeled the garment off.

As soon as Remus had discarded the last of their clothing, Abigail let out a little whine. Remus laughed warmly as he grabbed his wand and flicked it again, causing her to settle almost at once. Before Harry could even think of worrying about what he had done, Remus explained, “localised Air-Freshening Charm. She can't smell what we're up to now.”

“Probably should've thought of that before,” Harry admitted, to which Remus smiled.

“It's done,” he replied as he moved back over to Harry, and kissed him gently.

At first, Harry's parental instincts were still in control in spite of the fact that he knew that Abigail was all right. Remus touched him gently, almost as though he was trying to call Harry back to him. Slowly Harry relaxed, letting out a soft, needy moan as he coiled one of his legs around Remus's waist in silent invitation.

“Want you, Remus,” Harry breathed in between kisses. “*Please...*”

Harry half-expected Remus to respond with a teasing remark, but it appeared as though Remus was too far gone for that, and responded with a needy groan of his own. He coaxed Harry to lie flat on his back, which Harry did while bearing an almost silly grin upon his face, which caused Remus to chuckle warmly.

“Gods above, you are so beautiful, Harry,” Remus whispered reverently, which caused Harry to flush. He moved to protest his alpha's words, but Remus got there first. “I mean it. You are *beautiful*. Not just attractive, but you have the most beautiful soul. The most giving. It's an honour to call myself your mate.”

“Remus, I do love you, and I do appreciate your words, but...” Harry paused, and bit his lip. “Do you think we can save the sweeping proclamations of love for *after* we shag? Any longer and I think I'm going to explode.”

Remus laughed, a loud warm sound, but beyond that he said nothing, choosing instead to press a gentle kiss to Harry's lips before they at last proceeded.

Harry shuddered as he felt Remus's fingers reach down to probe his arse. Harry was so slick that he was certain he'd leave a wet spot on the bed, and he keened loudly when Remus drove two fingers into him, stretching him incrementally, and only stopping when Harry tapped his arm.

“Enough,” Harry breathed, “I want to *feel* you, love.”

Remus groaned, clearly sharing Harry's sentiment. He adjusted his position by lifting Harry's legs to hook around his waist before he guided his cock to the omega's waiting entrance, and Harry tilted his head back, breath still in his lungs as he waited to feel his mate penetrate him.

The sensation of Remus's thick cock breaching his hole made Harry groan aloud as though to say, *finally*.

Unfortunately, Remus was inching in far too slowly for Harry's liking. It was difficult to say whether the alpha was trying to savour the moment, or harking back to their early days, when

he was entirely *too* careful with Harry.

Perhaps Harry should have asked to be certain, but he was lost in his own arousal, and *needed* Remus to get on with it.

Instead of speaking, Harry tightened his legs around Remus's waist, and dragged himself forward, thrusting himself onto Remus's delicious cock in one slick movement.

“*Oh*,” Remus grunted, his eyes widening a little at Harry's sudden action, but he did not appear at all disappointed by this act. Instead he rocked back, then thrust forward with equal ferocity, making Harry cry out with pleasure.

The fierce need with which they fucked was something Harry had sorely missed in recent months. Ever since Abigail had been born, their private time was careful, tender, sweet.

Satisfying, but ultimately not entirely what Harry and Remus had needed.

This time, it was different.

There was a desperation in their movements now. A fiery need for each other that could not be sated with careful loving touches. This fierce, almost animalistic way they shagged was like they were burning out all the fear and uncertainty that had plagued them ever since Abigail had been born—scorching the land so that new life could grow.

The headboard banged loudly into the wall, leaving a noticeable dent. Remus growled like his werewolf counterpart as he slammed into a writhing and moaning Harry, making the omega doubly glad for the silencing charms in place—there was no *way* they'd be able to keep the kids from freaking out if they heard any of this.

It was Harry who came first, choking out grunts of pleasure as he hit his peak with a cry, his cock sputtering out dots of cum over their abdomens before he sank, boneless, into the bed. Remus was too lost in his own pleasure to ease up on his motions, breathing harshly as he battered Harry's arse, then with one last deep thrust, Harry felt the alpha's knot take hold, sealing them together as Remus came hard, filling Harry with his cum.

“Oh sweet lord, that was *incredible*,” Harry breathed as he slumped back upon the bed, his legs falling away from Remus's waist at an awkward angle as he added, “though I don't really think we thought this position through very well...”

Remus laughed in agreement before he said, “here, I think this might be a bit more comfortable...”

Gently, he coaxed Harry onto his side, and they lay face to face, their legs a little tangled to account for Remus's persistent knot, but all things considered, it wasn't the most uncomfortable thing in the world.

Harry elected to distract himself from the awkward position by kissing his mate, while Remus, in turn, waved his wand, dispelling the scent of sex in the room as well as the air-

freshening and silencing charms. Thankfully, Abigail appeared content to sleep on and did not wake, for which Harry was deeply grateful.

“Is it weird to say that I almost feel like sending Lucius a thank you note?” Harry murmured softly in a bid to keep from waking the baby, and Remus covered his mouth in order to stifle a laugh.

“Why on *earth* would you want to do something like that?” Remus asked, his incredulous tone making Harry grin at his partner impishly.

“Well...if it hadn't been for his bollocks attempt to claim me none of this would've happened. I would never have considered you as a partner, we never would have been forced together...I wouldn't've adopted Teddy, or had Abigail. So really, this is *all his fault*.”

“Perhaps we should compose it together,” Remus added teasingly, which made Harry giggle. “Make it all proper and official. Something to truly show our gratitude.”

“A fruit basket, or bouquet of flowers?” Harry added, which made Remus laugh again, his shoulders shaking as he fought to keep himself quiet. “Is there a kind of flowers that all Slytherins collectively hate? Because we should get those.”

“Dandelions, perhaps?” Remus asked teasingly, which made Harry giggle again.

“I can't imagine how confused the Azkaban guards would be if Lucius Malfoy got a delivery of dandelions from us,” Harry said, which caused Remus to chuckle again.

“You know what I love more than this idea?” he asked, and Harry blinked at him curiously.

“No, what?”

“How you can speak of Lucius now without even a tremor in your voice,” Remus said as he continued to smile. “It's heartening to see, Harry.”

~*~

Tonight it appeared as though Abigail had acquired a good sense of timing, only beginning to fuss when Remus's knot began to go down, enabling then to separate before Harry threw on a pair of pyjama bottoms, and moved over to the bassinet to check on her.

“Oh, love, what's the matter?” Harry cooed as he picked up the fussy baby. “Are you hungry?”

The question was met with another whine on the cusp of crying, and Harry smiled warmly as he climbed back onto the bed with the baby.

Remus eased down next to him, smiling as he watched Harry bring Abigail to his chest and let her suckle. At the same moment their bedroom doorknob rattled softly before it opened, showing Teddy to be standing there hugging his plush bear and the duvet from his bed to his chest, all while managing to keep his thumb in his mouth.

His eyes were a little red, telling Harry that the boy had been crying. Without having to ask, Remus immediately got up to go deal with him.

“Did you have a nightmare, son?” Remus asked as he crouched before him, and Teddy nodded a little. “Want to sleep with us? But you need to be quiet so you don't wake your sister.”

“Okay, Daddy,” Teddy whispered, though his whisper-voice wasn't much quieter than his regular voice. The sound of it made Harry smile, and he waved Teddy in with his free arm while he continued to nurse Abigail.

Remus took one of Teddy's little hands, and guided him into the room. The two parents exchanged a look, both knowing that they shouldn't be indulging him after all the boy had endured, and they didn't want him to fall back into old habits.

However, after the pleasant day they'd had, Harry couldn't quite fathom the idea of turning Teddy away, his smile even broadening as Teddy clambered onto the bed, and he shuffled close to his adoptive father.

“Feel better, Ted?” Harry asked softly as Abigail finished eating, and he brought the infant to his shoulder while Teddy nodded.

“Daddy always scares the monsters away,” Teddy said, and Harry smiled as his eyes moved past the boy, and to his partner.

“Yeah, Teddy,” Harry agreed, “he does.”

Harry smiled warmly at his son, his daughter held aloft in his arms as he gently burped her. When he'd finished, Teddy stood up on the bed to kiss Abigail on the cheek before he said, “goodnight, Abby. I love you.”

Harry smiled, not quite sure what he could say in response to Teddy's words without crying. Instead, he settled Abigail back in her bassinet, then lay down with his mate and his son, the two adults bracketing the boy as he cuddled up with both of them happily.

“Come on, Teddy,” Harry whispered as he pet his violet hair, “let's get some sleep.”

Teddy responded by tucking his head against Harry's chest with a sweet little sigh. Remus smiled at Harry over the boy's head with clear adoration. Harry reached across Teddy's little body for his mate, and Remus threaded his fingers with the omega's.

In that moment, Harry felt with absolute certainty what he had known all along—he had made the right choice with Remus. With him, his life was whole.

Harry was, at last, complete.

Epilogue – Upon Platform 9¾

Chapter Notes

A/N: Happy Holidays, guys! Thank you so much for your patience during this difficult time. Losing my aunt was really hard, she was like a second mom to me, and so to have the support of all of you was absolutely incredible. I hope you guys enjoy this very last instalment of this story. It's been a lot of fun to write, and I promise that this is far from my last foray into Harry/Remus!

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Epilogue – Upon Platform 9¾

Harry had grown to love mornings.

The soft chirping of the birds, the way the sun would gradually peer in through the curtains, and, of course, the feeling of his husband next to him as he slowly began to stir.

This morning, that joy was eclipsed somewhat by a few lingering things—apprehension, fear, and heartburn.

The first two were caused entirely by Abigail, who was, at last, due to start Hogwarts, as they had planned all those years ago.

The third was caused entirely by Abigail's baby brother, who, unlike his older sister, was *late*.

Harry glared at his enormously rotund belly. The little bugger was a week late already, and Harry had been hoping that he would have had the child by now, in particular when it put a bit of a damper on his plans to be Abigail's escort to school.

Ron and Hermione had risen to the challenge however, and Hermione would be taking Abigail on the Hogwarts Express in his stead. After that, Ron would be meeting her at the platform in Hogsmeade to take her on the carriages to the school, where, at last, she would be passed to her Coordination Therapist on staff, who would teach her how to navigate the school along with Moony, her seeing-eye dog.

Well, seeing-eye *wolf*.

In some ways, it was a good plan, but Harry hated the idea of accidentally isolating Abigail around a bunch of adults, and missing that first boat ride to Hogwarts. Though the therapist had reassured Harry that Abigail would be fully independent in a few weeks, at most, and she was not barred from making new friends—it was just at first until she was acclimated to the new environment.

A cold wet nose abruptly nudged Harry's cheek, drawing him out of his daze entirely. He rolled over and smiled when he saw Moony, the wolf-husky hybrid. Though he appeared big and fierce, the creature was as gentle as a lamb.

And, though Remus would never say so, he seemed to find comfort in the wolf's presence—a kinship he hadn't known he had needed before. Harry liked that for his mate.

“Time to get up, eh, boy?” Harry asked softly. “Or did Abby send you to get us up?”

Moony responded by wagging his tail, and he nudged Harry's cheek again.

“All right, all right, I'm getting up...”

With a soft groan, Harry rolled from the bed, put his glasses and dressing gown on, and waddled out of the bedroom where Remus was still fast asleep, perhaps worn out by completing the braille versions of Abigail's schoolbooks for the year. He had been pulling a number of sleepless nights to finish them on time, while Harry had been gifted with the easier preparation for Abigail's start at Hogwarts by shelling out more gold than he'd anticipated for transcription quills and wizarding recording devices that would read the lectures of the professors back to her when she needed to study.

Teddy, to his credit, never got jealous over the extra attention, nor his parents' ridiculous enthusiasm in labelling everything in the house with braille labels when Abigail had started to read, or even when they brought Moony home for her.

At the time, Teddy had been around nine, and instead of protesting Abigail getting a dog, he quietly picked Bast up and carried her off before she pitched a fit over the enormous animal in her space.

When Harry at last made it downstairs, he spotted Abigail at the cooker, making herself an omelette with something green inside. When she first started learning to cook Harry was somewhat terrified at the prospect, but even without her sight she did it fairly well, and was always extra-careful when using knives. Remus had taken up the task of teaching her, and his patience had led to their daughter often being the first one up as she confidently used the kitchen like she could see perfectly well.

“Morning, Papa,” she said cheerily when Harry sat down—one of her other talents. Without even having to say anything, Abigail always knew who was there by the way they walked or

moved. “I’m sorry I’m up so early, I just...oh, I’m *so* excited! Do you want half of my omelette? It’s goat cheese and rocket.”

“Oh, *very* fancy,” Harry said teasingly, making her giggle. “Can you manage a spot of tea as well?”

“I’ll put the kettle on,” she replied, reaching towards the tin kettle at the back of the cooker, fumbling as she felt for it for a long moment, then grabbed the handle and felt her way to the sink, filling it up before she placed it back on the cooker and switched on the flame.

“What sort of tea do you want, Papa?” she asked as she turned to him, but as always, looked past him. It had taken Harry a while, but he had finally gotten used to the blank stare she often gave him.

“Peppermint, I should think,” Harry replied with a faint grimace. “Bring the tin over, love, and I’ll look for it—save you the trouble.”

Abigail did what he asked, and carried the round tea tin over to their little kitchen table, and set it in the centre. She knocked over the pepper shaker in the process, but did not seem to hear it over the hissing of her cooking breakfast and the kettle heating up.

Harry said nothing, righting the shaker before he opened the tin and picked out one of the little green packets that held the individual teabag he wanted, he pressed it into his daughter’s hand with a smile, allowing her to get on with it. Of course, he could manage a cuppa tea even in his *delicate* state, but Abigail seemed to truly enjoy helping others, especially her woefully pregnant father.

Harry watched, doing his best to not hover—Abigail *hated* it when people did that, though the worst culprit had always been her Grandmum Weasley.

Harry knew better than to worry—his daughter knew this house well, and had long since mastered the art of moving through it without much help.

As Harry watched her, it was hard to believe that he could all but fit her in one hand when she’d been born. Now, she was just barely a head shorter than him, her eyes a bright blue that Remus said had come from his mother, and her wavy ash blonde hair was reminiscent of Remus’s, though her facial structure and knobbly knees were *entirely* from Harry’s side of the family.

She was a beautiful girl, and Harry was *so* proud of her.

Harry got up at last in order to help Abigail carry the plates and cups to the table, and she happily teased her Papa about what might happen if he went into labour *right now*, which made Harry laugh—I *wish*.

“So,” Harry said as he cut into his omelette, and his daughter did the same, “all packed for school? Got your books? Robes? Quills...everything?”

“Yes, Papa,” she replied as she shook her head a little, smiling fondly over her father's worrying. “Everything is labelled and the Head Girl of whatever house I get sorted into is supposed to help me coordinate the living space so I know how many steps to take and things like that.”

“And remember to leave all your things in the same place,” Harry reminded her. “Especially your hair potion bottles. None of us have forgotten the blood-curdling shriek that came from our bathroom a month ago when you accidentally used Dad's hair remover salve instead of your shampoo...”

Harry grinned as he trailed off, and Abigail scrunched up her face in annoyance. Clearly she hadn't forgotten either.

“I'll be careful, Papa, as long as you *stop* bringing that story up. It's really embarrassing.”

“Your big brother thought it was pretty funny...”

“Teddy finds *everything* funny...except stinky old Victoire.”

“That's because Victoire is *classy*, and not some bald little gremlin,” a second voice chimed in, just as fourteen-year-old Teddy Lupin sauntered into the kitchen with a grin on his face, his hair a pale mauve today, and dressed in a pair of jeans as well as his mother's old *Weird Sisters* T-shirt.

Teddy grinned when Abby scowled, and hummed to himself as he went about preparing two slices of toast and a single egg for himself before he joined them at the table.

Harry chuckled to himself as he listened to the siblings bicker over their individual breakfasts. Though Harry and Remus had made a point of sharing family meals at lunch and dinner, over the last year as Abigail in particular began to enter her adolescence, they all got up at different times, and wanted to eat different things—especially Abigail, who was a much more adventurous eater than Teddy ever was. Harry knew that it bothered Remus that they didn't sit and eat together in the mornings, but once the kids were at school they'd likely resume eating breakfast together like a proper family.

At least until the little sprog finally decided to come out.

“Papa?” Teddy asked suddenly, his voice heavily muffled by the toast in his mouth. Harry gave him a look, and he grinned sheepishly, swallowing his toast before he spoke again. “I was just wondering...how come you and Dad waited so long before you decided to have another kid? I mean...aren't you kind of old now?”

“I'm thirty-one, Ted, I'm not *old*,” Harry said hotly, which made both the kids laugh. “And to answer your question, now just seemed the right time, that's all.”

Right time was about as vague as Harry could have managed, but he didn't think that explaining his anxiety over having another preemie to Teddy would go over well—especially with Abigail in the room. Harry knew Teddy was a smart kid, but he had a very Ron-esque blind spot when it came to emotional issues.

But most of all, he didn't want Abigail ever to feel like something was wrong with her because she had been born prematurely.

Luckily the response seemed to placate the boy, and he nodded as he went back to his breakfast, while Abigail asked, "if the baby comes before Christmas, can we come home to see him?"

"See?" Teddy inquired teasingly, and Abigail flicked a piece of goat cheese in Teddy's general direction, and he giggled as it flew past him.

"You know what I mean," she said, though by her tone Harry supposed she wasn't truly cross with Teddy's remark.

"The baby is a week late, love," Harry interjected before their harmless teasing could devolve into a real argument. "If it's not still out by Christmas I will be both worried and *very* grumpy."

"Grumpier than you are now?" Teddy asked in the same teasing tone, and Harry shot him another look. He grinned impishly, and went back to his toast.

It was getting close to ten o'clock by the time Remus got up, his hair a mess, and he was visibly in dire need of coffee. He paused just long enough to offer Harry a kiss and greet the kids before he shuffled farther into the kitchen and prepared himself a pot of coffee, toast, and some sausages.

Remus did not speak until he sat down and took a long, fortifying drink from his mug, then levelled his gaze to the two teens.

"It's ten," Remus said, his croaky voice making both the kids giggle a bit. "Are your trunks all packed up?"

"I'm just missing my books, Dad," Abigail said, pausing to sip her pumpkin juice. "You said you still needed to finish them."

"Right, Ted, go to my study and help your sister with her books."

Teddy nodded, and got up. Abigail used the audio cue of his chair scraping against the floor in order to get up and follow him. Teddy took her hand like he had done when they were little, and guided his sister out of the kitchen, even as she tugged her hand back and protested that she didn't need any help, which caused both Harry and Remus to smile.

"How are you feeling today, Harry?" Remus asked when the sounds of the older two finally died away. "Any contractions?"

"Not yet," Harry grumbled with a wince. "I was hoping one good sneeze would make my water break, but so far this little sprog seems pretty happy where he is."

“Well, then I'd like to take the chair with us to the Platform,” Remus said, and he chuckled when Harry let out a disgruntled whine.

“Remus, I hate using the wheelchair,” Harry complained. “Everyone always stares at me.”

“Compared to when you leave the house and *no one* stares at you, love?”

Harry glared, and Remus laughed again.

“It's just a precaution,” he said as he reached for Harry and took his hand. “I don't want you going into labour on the platform, that's all. If he hasn't come yet the chair is to just keep you from accidentally popping anything until we get home.”

“You hear that, kid?” Harry said as he stared down at his stomach, “stay where you are for *one more hour*. Then by all that is holy, if you don't come out by the end of the day I am coming in after you!”

~*~

Despite Harry's continued complaints, he was still guilted into using the chair.

Abigail walked ahead of them, giggling as she listened to her papa's grumbling, counting her steps as Moony guided her from the walkway to the pavement. Remus was carrying her trunk, and Teddy was sporting his own, walking alongside Harry with a grin on his face, like he was just barely managing to keep from teasing the woefully pregnant omega.

“Just you wait, Ted,” Harry said as he used his wand to roll along. “One day, Victoire will do this to *you*. Did you remember your suppressants?”

“Yeah, Papa,” Teddy replied, his grin softening a little. “If Victoire *does* knock me up, I won't complain half as much as you though. I also got extras, you know, just in case.”

He cast a pointed look to Abigail, and Harry nodded. Abigail wasn't likely to present as omega for a few years yet, but it didn't hurt to be cautious. Abigail knew her designation, of course, but it was generally meaningless to her as she did not wholly understand the finer details of what being an omega *meant*.

“We'll see about that,” Harry muttered at last, which caused Remus to start laughing softly. Despite the joking and teasing, Teddy was well-aware how lucky he had been to avoid most of the more discriminatory omega laws, which had gradually been overturned in recent years. If someone tried to claim him against his will, he would have many more resources to fight against it.

Abigail too, when the time came.

The little family moved down the street until they reached a little field, and by the roadside was a discarded cotton glove—a Portkey that would aid them in their travels to King's Cross.

“Over here, love,” Remus called to Abigail, and she followed the sound of her father's voice, stopping when Moony did. The others followed suit until they were all in a semicircle around the garment.

“You sure this is pregnancy-friendly?” Harry asked as Remus picked it up, and he offered Harry a small, reassuring smile. Even as he asked, he felt a familiar twinge of pain in his back.

Oh, don't you dare, you little sprog. Don't you move.

“Yes, I made that clear when I requested it with the Ministry,” Remus replied, drawing Harry out of his thoughts. He breathed through the pain; it wasn't bad enough to be worrisome—*yet*. Labour pain did not necessarily mean his water was near to breaking, after all.

“Okay, good,” Harry said as he rubbed a hand across his belly. “Let's get going, then.”

Harry reached out his hand next to touch the Portkey, followed by Teddy. Moony used his nose to guide Abigail's hand to it, then he lifted a paw to touch the Portkey as well.

Harry had only a moment to smile at the sight of his family before he felt that telltale tug behind his navel, and they were off.

As promised, the Portkey was a bit gentler on him than a normal one may have been, and deposited him harmlessly in the alleyway across from the station, though Teddy and Abigail had fallen into a tangled heap, while Remus chuckled and patiently helped the kids up.

“How far are we from the station, Papa?” Abigail asked as she straightened up, brushing a hand over her clothing, while Teddy and Remus gathered up the trunks.

“Just across the street, love,” Harry replied with a reassuring smile. “We're in an alleyway, so maybe five steps to the pavement, then we're going right, to the crosswalk, then across the road.”

“That's not far at all!” Abigail chirped happily as she fixed her grip on Moony's lead, “come on, Moony, lead the way!”

Abigail walked confidently from the alley, visibly counting her steps before she turned as Harry had instructed, and let Moony guide her to the crosswalk. The others had to hasten to catch up with her, and Harry could not help but laugh at her confidence—really, had it not been for Moony's special vest, no one would know that she was blind.

“Dad?” Abigail said as they at last caught up to her, her voice wavering a little, as it always did when she had to cross busy streets. “That's you, right?”

“I'm here, sweetheart,” Remus replied as he laid a hand on her shoulder. “Is something the matter?”

“I—I couldn't find the crossing button...” she explained meekly, “and I'm not sure which way the cars are going, but Moony says I shouldn't cross, because he's sitting, so I know it's probably not safe...”

“It's all right,” Remus said gently, “you're doing the right thing, asking for help. Remember, asking for help isn't a weakness—it's a *strength*. Even sighted people have to ask for help sometimes, and it's okay. The button is here, let me show you...”

Remus moved a hand to Abigail's wrist, even as she flushed with shame for having to ask. She never did like depending on other people.

Harry said nothing as he watched the father and daughter exchange, unable to stop his smile as Remus gently guided the girl's hand to the light pole where the button was, and he allowed her to push it.

“The light is red right across from us, love,” Remus explained as Abigail's arm fell back to her side. “And the one across from it is green. Can you hear the cars?” Abigail nodded. “Now, it's changing, listen to the difference.”

“I can hear it, Dad!” she exclaimed, a look of excitement crossing her face, which caused Remus to chuckle warmly.

“Right then, let's go. Watch for the step on the kerb.”

Abigail obeyed her father, smiling as she stepped down with renewed confidence, and the others followed, just as Harry felt another bolt of pain in his lower back.

This one was stronger, and he fought to keep himself from gasping in pain. If Remus noticed he'd *freak out* and they'd ruin Abigail's first trip to Hogwarts.

Harry could manage until Abigail was on the train.

He hoped.

~*~

Harry was really in too much pain to be annoyed by the confused or disapproving looks the muggles gave him as they headed into the station. In the last months he'd been subject to everything from unsolicited dieting advice to fervent whispers about whether or not he was simply a masculine woman.

It was to be expected, given that muggles did not have secondary sexes, but that didn't make it any less frustrating.

Harry lagged behind a little while Remus guided Abigail towards the train platforms. They counted the steps between each platform together, which seemed to boost Abigail's

confidence, and Harry noted that she was thankfully relying on Moony more than she normally may have, trusting him to guide her through the bustling crowd.

"I'll go through first with Abigail," Remus said when they'd reached the barrier between platforms nine and ten. "Then you and Teddy can follow."

"Sounds good," Harry replied, smiling a little, and markedly relieved that Remus spoke in between contractions. They were still fairly far apart, but advancing sooner than Harry would have liked. Clearly his unborn son had an *appalling* sense of timing.

"Papa?" Teddy asked when Remus walked back over to Abigail, and Harry turned to him. "Are you okay? You've been acting sort of odd ever since we left."

"Can you keep a secret?" Harry asked, arching a brow at him. "It's a big secret, so you have to promise not to say anything to Dad, okay?"

"Okay," Teddy agreed, grinning a little. "Especially if it'll make Dad a little barmy."

"James has decided that now is the perfect time to come out," Harry whispered, making Teddy's eyes bulge in their sockets.

"You mean the baby is coming *right now*?!" Teddy hissed incredulously. "Why haven't you *said* anything? What if he comes out right on the platform? What if my friends see? Papa, you *made me* look at childbirth photographs and it's messy and there's...there's *liquids*! And arses! I don't want to see *any* of that!"

"Teddy, breathe, okay?" Harry said hastily while he did his best not to laugh. "I'm just having contractions right now, and that means that the baby is getting ready to come out, but he won't come out *yet*. It takes hours and hours, but I don't want to miss seeing you and your sister off. But your dad..."

"Freaks out if any of us so much as sneeze, I know," Teddy filled in, and rolled his eyes, which made Harry laugh. "Can I tell Abby on the train?"

"Yeah, sure. Just not before," Harry agreed, just as he saw Abigail, Moony, and Remus slip through the barrier. "Come on, let's go."

When Harry and Teddy passed through the barrier and onto Platform 9¾, Teddy groaned, and it didn't take Harry very long to discover the source of his frustration.

Molly had cornered Remus, while Hermione and Andromeda kept Abigail company. By the sour, almost angry look on Remus's face it was clear that Molly was—once again—voicing concerns over Abigail attending Hogwarts when she was visually impaired.

Harry now knew better than to intervene; all the extreme emotional responses were bad enough, but when Molly would round on Harry, Remus's protective alpha instincts always flared up, leaving everyone rattled, crying, or furiously angry, which had only gotten worse when Harry's pregnancy hormones came into play.

As a result, Harry hung back and let Remus handle it. In this, he had no problems letting Remus protect his daughter's independence, regardless how much Molly wanted to coddle her.

“D’you think Grandmum Weasley will ever work out that Abby isn’t helpless?” Teddy grumbled, clearly having worked out why his other father looked so angry with the older woman, and Harry frowned as he reached for his son’s hand and gave it a little squeeze.

“She means well, your Gran, she just forgets sometimes that kids aren’t helpless or completely stupid. None of us can really empathize with being without our sight—it’s natural to Abigail, but for us it would be completely debilitating. I think because of that your Gran feels like it’d be impossible to navigate through Hogwarts since it’s so big.”

“Even with me and her helper, and you, whenever you finish having the baby and come back to the school and everything.” Teddy paused, and added, “I hope you come back soon—Draco doesn’t let us get away with *anything*. One time he threatened to hex me when I tried to sneak into one of the beds for a nap.”

“Which is different from all the times he’s been over for tea and threatened to hex you for putting a frog in his teacup, or added hair-changing potion to his tea, or swapped the sugar for salt...” Harry trailed off, grinning, while his son flushed red. “Be fair, Ted, Draco has a *lot* of reasons to want to hex you.”

Their conversation petered off as they stopped next to Hermione, and Harry asked softly, “is Molly still berating my mate?”

“Unfortunately,” Hermione said with a huff as she crossed her arms. “I wish Molly would stop being so foolish about this whole thing. She won’t listen to *anyone* on...” she glanced over to Abigail, who was chatting with Andromeda, and hesitated. “On...the matter.”

“I think by Christmas she will have worked out that there is no reason for her fretting,” Andromeda added in, clearly having heard them, just as the train whistled in warning, and Abigail’s face lit up with newfound excitement.

“Is it time to go?” she asked, “Papa, am I *really* going to go?”

“Of course, let’s get you on the train!” Harry couldn’t help smiling at his child, despite the fact that she couldn’t see it. He craned his neck over to the arguing pair and called, “*Remus! It’s time!*”

The shout gave Remus an easy escape, and he slipped past Molly, appearing quite pleased with himself, and stopped before his daughter. Molly looked as though she intended to follow him, but thankfully Arthur stepped in, and laid a firm hand upon Molly’s shoulder, stopping her short.

“Where’s your trunk, sweetheart?” Remus asked as he stopped in front of his daughter, and Abigail’s smile seemed to brighten even more.

“Aunt Hermione took it,” she explained as the family moved towards the train. “She said she put it in the compartment with Teddy, Victoire, and Dominique's luggage but if Teddy and Victoire snog the entire way I am *switching*, Daddy. I can hear the smacking and it's *disgusting*.”

“You heard her, Ted,” Harry said teasingly, just as Victoire and her sister poked their heads out of the train's doors. “No snogging in front of your sister.”

“Oh thank *God*,” drawled Dominique, which made Harry snort. “I am so tired of them kissing all over the place.”

Victoire opened her mouth to argue, just as the train whistled again. Harry hugged each of his children tightly, Abigail more than Teddy, who clutched her Papa almost desperately.

“You'll be okay, love,” Harry whispered. “You have your Coordination Therapist, Mrs Ripley, and Aunt Hermione and your friends and your brother will be with you the whole way there, then Uncle Ron will take you on the carriages, and you'll have Moony with you at all times, so don't you worry about *anything*, and just send us an owl tonight if you can, and let us know where you were sorted, all right?”

Harry said all of this very fast, doing his very best to ignore how wet his eyes were getting. Abigail kissed her papa on the cheek before Remus moved in for his turn, hugging her as well before he slowly, reluctantly, passed her over to Hermione, who guided her and Moony onto the train, closely followed by Teddy, who turned and grinned at Harry before he leant in and whispered something to his sister. She jumped and shouted something to Hermione, but over the hiss of the engine as it began to move, he didn't catch it.

He did however catch Hermione's words when she bustled back to the door, flung it open and shouted at the very top of her lungs, “*HARRY JAMES POTTER-LUPIN ARE YOU COMPLETELY MAD?! GET TO THE HOSPITAL RIGHT NOW!*”

Harry howled with laughter as he waved the kids off, only then noticing Bill and Fleur meandering over to them, looking amused, while Remus looked concerned and *mightily* confused.

“So, what on earth was my sister-in-law shouting about?” Bill asked when he reached them, and Harry grinned sheepishly.

“I went into labour the second we left the house, but I didn't want to spoil Abby's first day, so I—”

“So you said *nothing*?” Remus sputtered, his eyes wide, and Harry laughed again, grinning even as Remus began to visibly panic.

“Teddy noticed me going through a contraction so I told him what was happening, and I made him promise not to say anything until they were all on the train. He blurted it out way faster than I'd hoped for.”

“Be fair, Teddy has never been known for being the best at keeping secrets,” Andromeda teased, smiling a little. “But you really should get to the hospital, Harry, I—why are you shaking your head?”

“We planned a home birth,” Harry explained. “After everything with Abby I wanted a place where I felt safe, so I decided a home birth, a few pain potions, and a midwife are all I will need—and Remus, of course.”

“As if that's all you'll need,” Bill said teasingly. “Of course all of us want to support the latest addition to the family. You can trust us all to be there.”

“Thanks, Bill,” Harry said with a weak laugh, “mind you, in shifts, all right? Let us get home and get me organized, and in a couple of hours when we have a more realistic timeline *then* you can flood my house with Weasleys.”

“Fair,” he agreed. “Who's your midwife going to be?”

“The only person in the world I trust to touch my arse...”

~*~

“All right, Potter, let me see if I understand this,” Draco said as he accepted a cup of tea from Remus, and pinched his temple with his free hand. He sipped the brew without hesitation for once, likely due to the fact that his little tormentor was absent. “You started going into labour *this morning*, but instead of being logical about it and telling your husband or *me*, you decided to spend a few hours mucking about at King's Cross before Granger told the *entire platform*? Is that it?”

“It wasn't mucking about,” Harry said defensively, pacing in a long nightshirt that they'd chosen weeks before to serve as Harry's birthing garment. “I was seeing my children off. I didn't want to spoil Abby's first time on the train. I just...held it for a bit.”

“Your child is not urine, Potter, you cannot simply *hold it*. You're lucky you didn't give birth right on the bloody platform!”

“My water's not even broken yet. You'll feel the same when little Morgana takes her first trip on the train.”

“Not bloody likely,” Draco countered as he cast a glance to the baby swing where the nine-month-old blue-eyed, red-haired baby was happily gumming on a teether toy shaped like a snitch. “I have common *sense*. Something you seem to have missed over the course of your entire life.”

“Gentlemen, can you please stop bickering?” Remus asked as he glanced between them. “I have had more than enough arguments for one day. Harry, what you did was foolish, but you

do know your own body. *If* there's a next time, at least warn me when you wish to pull a stunt like that."

Harry sat down on the bed before he nodded, and in the same moment swore as a contraction hit, and Remus hurried over to hold his hand and help him breathe through it.

"Bloody *hell*," Harry groaned out, "I'm starting to miss the part where I was unconscious for Abby's birth..."

"Don't say that, you're doing just fine, love," Remus murmured as he moved in to kiss him, then looked back to Draco, who was consulting his pocket watch and a sheet of parchment in front of him. "How far apart was that one?"

"Six minutes," he replied as he jotted it down. "He should break soon, but if his water hasn't broken by the two-minute marker, I'd like to do it with potions, just to ensure there are as few complications as possible." He paused, and glanced over to baby Morgana. "And perhaps I should contact Charlie. I doubt it's a very good idea for my daughter to hear the Chosen One screaming in pain for hours on end."

"We probably have a few hours yet before the active labour starts if you can't get hold of him," Harry said, panting a little as he came down from the pain. He did not miss Remus shaking out his hand, as though Harry's grip had hurt him. "I'm guessing you two are still not speaking to Molly?"

"That's one way of putting it," Draco replied, smirking wryly. "I cannot fathom how she went on so long insisting I was just Charlie's *friend*, and then Morgana came along, and she reacted rather badly...although not as badly as Father."

"I remember," Harry said, offering his former rival an apologetic smile. "Still thinks rather highly of himself for someone in prison."

"Did you hear his sentence was extended by twenty years?" Draco asked with a rather nasty laugh. "Attempted escape, stealing the wand of an Auror, *and* nearly murdering a guard. At this rate he'll spend the rest of his life in that place."

"I try not to think about him, to be honest," Harry admitted, "except when his parole comes up and I have to remind the Wizengamot why he should stay put. I'm glad he got the extension though, sounds like he's not ready to be on the outside yet."

"I don't think about him either, Potter," Draco said, though his tone was icy, like he was trying to prove how strong he was by hating his own father. Despite the attempt however, Harry could hear the pain behind the words, something Harry couldn't quite empathize with—he'd never been related to someone like *that*.

Their idle chitchat was interspersed by both letters from the Weasleys and Andromeda, checking up on Harry, more contractions, and Remus attempting to feed Harry, but he only managed a few gulps of water. Considering all that was happening, he was *not* in the right frame of mind for food.

It took a few more hours for Harry's water to break, far longer than he would have liked, if he was being honest with himself. It was coming on evening when it finally happened, and felt very much like someone had exploded a water balloon between his legs. It was the oddest feeling.

“Oh, bloody hell, it's happening,” Harry moaned, and Draco shifted from friend to healer in an instant as he snapped on his dragonhide gloves, while Remus eased Harry back onto the bed, petting his damp hair.

“It's all right, love, just breathe, you're doing so well,” Remus said as he pressed a kiss to Harry's forehead. “Do you want some pain potion?”

Harry nodded, and Remus brought a goblet of violently green potion to his lips, which he gulped down, and tried to not dwell too much on the taste. At the same time, Draco moved to the end of the bed as he said, “Potter, I need to check how dilated you are; may I examine you?”

Harry nodded again, not quite certain if he was up to speaking, and watched with a sort of morbid curiosity as Draco lifted the hem of the long nightshirt, and he felt Draco's gloved fingers prod at his arse for a moment before he pulled back.

“Five centimetres,” he announced, making Harry groan as his head slumped back against the pillows. He knew from his own studies that he needed to be between ten and fifteen before the birth would happen, to account for a male omega's more narrow birth canal. “You've got a long night ahead of you, Potter.”

“I hate this kid,” Harry proclaimed, which caused Remus to laugh.

~*~

Harry quickly learnt that breathing through contractions while his body was concurrently telling him to *push* was effectively the worst thing ever.

At eight o'clock and seven centimetres, Teddy's owl interrupted Harry's string of curses and crying, which bore two letters, one from Teddy and one from Abigail, informing the parents that she'd been sorted into Hufflepuff alongside her brother, paired with demands for news on how their papa was doing.

Under normal circumstances, Harry would have been overjoyed by the news that the kids had gotten to Hogwarts safe and sound, and that Abigail would be in Hufflepuff with her brother.

Instead, he was still swearing.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck, *fuck* that hurts!” Harry wailed, despite all the pain potion coursing through his system, it definitely wasn't helping very much. “I've changed my mind, I want this kid out *now*! Knock me out and cut it out of me, I don't care, I just *can't* do this anymore!”

“You *can*, love, just breathe through it, you're halfway there,” Remus said as he stroked Harry's sweat-damp hair, and Harry let out another feeble moan of pain.

“I-It's too h-hard,” Harry choked out, too lost in the pain to even be embarrassed about being on the cusp of crying. “Give me another Dark Lord to fight, that hurt less than *this*.”

Draco snickered as he cleaned, sterilized, and set aside his gloves, apparently unconcerned about interrupting the couple's moment with his laughter. Instead, he went to the door of the bedroom where a blue eye was peeking in, and Draco opened it farther in order to speak to Charlie and greet baby Morgana, who appeared thrilled at the sight of her birth father.

“It's all right, Harry,” Remus murmured, his voice drawing Harry's attention back to his mate. “I know it hurts—I cannot even *fathom* how much it hurts, but you're halfway there. It took so much to get here, but we're here because of how much you wanted this baby. You spent *months* with your mind healer, with me, and with our children, working through your fears of pregnancy after what happened with Abigail because *you* wanted another child. I know it hurts, and I know you're scared, but you're almost there, my love, and you *can* do this.”

“Yeah,” Harry agreed, his voice shaking a little as the pain momentarily subsided. “I remember how you wouldn't even talk about it for a long time, because of how terrified you were of pushing me one way or the other, at least until you talked to Robert with me.”

“I did,” Remus agreed as he moved in to peck Harry's lips. “And we decided on this together—when you felt ready. If you can do all that, Harry, you can *most certainly* do this.”

Harry opened his mouth to respond, when another contraction overwhelmed him, and he cried out as he clutched to Remus's hand tightly.

Remus, ever the supportive mate, held fast to him, and did not let go.

~*~

Harry wasn't certain how much time had passed. The world was a cycle of pain and exhaustion, and when he next chanced a glance at the clock, it was almost three in the morning. Teddy's owl, Llewellyn, was sitting on the window sill, its beak clicking impatiently, as though it was awaiting news. Remus had tried to shoo her—repeatedly—but the owl refused to move.

“Ready for another check on how dilated you are?” Draco asked as he snapped on the gloves again, and went about sanitizing them, while Harry let out a feeble groan.

"I don't care anymore," Harry mumbled for what felt like the dozenth time, staring at the ceiling while Draco slipped his hands under the hem of the nightshirt again. "I just want it to be *over*."

"Well, it will be soon," Draco said, smirking a little as he straightened up. "You're crowning."

"Oh thank *god*!" Harry cried, not sure if he wanted to laugh or cry in relief. Maybe both. Remus beamed, and kissed Harry's temple in response while Draco waved his wand, conjuring a basin of warm water, fresh towels, and a stack of clean blankets.

"Now, Potter, on the next contraction, you need to bear down and *push*," Draco instructed in a no-nonsense sort of way. "It may take some time, but you're nearly there, so don't go doing anything so foolish as talking any more about giving up. I have looked at your arse *far* too many times tonight for you to quit on me now."

Harry snorted, but he did as he was told. As the contraction came, he clutched tight to Remus, and let out an almighty screech as he pushed as hard as he could. Remus was chanting, "push, push, *push*!" next to him, while Draco shouted, "come *on*, Potter!" from between his legs, his gloved hands held out like a baseball catcher's mitts.

As the contraction passed, Harry let out a huff as he slumped back on the bed, panting hard. Remus patted his forehead with a towel, and kissed him again.

"How much longer will this take?" Remus asked Draco without taking his eyes off Harry, and though Harry could not see him, he could still imagine Draco's disinclined look at the idea of answering that particular question.

"You probably don't want me to answer that, Lupin."

Once again, the cycle of pain and rest continued. This time it was paired with Harry's need to push with every contraction, but after more than an hour at it, Harry was beginning to hit the end of his stamina. He was just so *tired*.

"Come on, come on, love," Remus encouraged as Harry gasped for breath. "You have to push, you're nearly there..."

"I can't...I don't want to..." Harry whispered, his voice reedy with exhaustion and a sudden swell of emotion. "I don't want to push anymore..."

And yet, despite the protest, and how tired he was, when the next contraction came, he felt compelled to push. He screamed and cried, while this time he heard something else—Draco saying something about shoulders, and scissors. What was happening?

And then he heard it.

The raspy cry of a newborn baby.

Draco dropped the squalling, viscera-coated newborn onto Harry's chest, little fists curled into balls, eyes squeezed shut, and black hair pinned to his little head.

For a moment, Harry was too shocked to even move, and just stared at the tiny screaming infant that lay upon him. Even so, his arms came up to cradle him, hushing him gently, while Remus and Draco moved in to cut the cord and heal it into a little normal-looking belly button within moments.

"Hey there," Harry rasped as he rocked the newborn, while slowly the baby's screams shifted to a soft snuffling. "You're finally here...wow..."

"He's shown the miracle of life and all he says is *wow*?" Draco demanded, which made Harry grin sheepishly.

"Be fair, Harry's exhausted," Remus said. "Give him a little time before you barrage him with your usual barbs."

"Remus," Harry said weakly, smiling up at his mate, who had not left his side since the contractions started at ten-thirty that morning. "Can you believe it? Nineteen hours of misery and out *he* comes, and...it's like I can barely remember it."

"He's beautiful, Harry," Remus murmured softly as he moved in to press a kiss to the omega's cheek, then his lips. "You did such a wonderful job today, with *everything*. I'm so proud of you, love."

"Can you wash him up, Draco?" Harry asked sheepishly. "I'm not sure I can really move, but I'd like to try and get cleaned up and everything, then get some rest."

"Of course," Draco said, "if you pass me little James I will give him a proper bath and some nice warm blankets, but I'd like you to pass the placenta before we move you and work on cleaning you up, just so that you don't soil your sheets with more bodily fluids."

"Okay, that sounds all right," Harry said as he gingerly picked up the newborn and handed him over to Draco, who did not mind so much, and in fact did not even fuss when Draco took a soft baby cloth to him, and proceeded to wash him by hand. "Hang on—how did you know what we agreed to call him? Who told you?"

"Please, Harry, I didn't need anyone to tell me," Draco scoffed. "You're so *predictable*. I mean, what *else* would you and your mate call a boy-child? Kevin? Bob? Gavin? You are far too sentimental for something like that."

"Well, I bet you won't guess the middle name we chose," Harry shot back, almost sullenly, while Draco gently moved the infant to the soft towels that had been prepared, and dried the boy off before at last he was bundled up in a blue and grey checked blanket and matching beanie before he was at last passed into Harry's waiting arms.

"Sirius, obviously," Draco quipped, even as Harry felt his heart soften and his irritation fade as he cradled the newborn, smiling down at his content little face. "He's perfectly healthy, Harry. All ten fingers and toes."

"Thanks, Draco," Harry whispered without looking up, and hand moving to gently touch the baby's cheek. Remus lent against him in order to gaze down at the newborn, and kissed Harry's cheek lightly.

"He looks just like you, love," Remus murmured, which made Harry smile.

"He's got my hair," Harry said, "but he looks *so much* like you."

"Then he must be yours," Draco interjected, apparently uncaring that he was spoiling their moment. When Harry gazed up, Draco was smirking, and bearing a letter in hand. "Shall I deliver this letter personally, or just bring your kids here by Floo to meet their baby brother?"

"Give me a few hours to rest, then you can bring the kids from school, I doubt Albus would mind," Harry said as he dropped his gaze back to the babe. "And I think you could do with a little rest yourself, Draco. Thanks for being here for all of it."

"What I wouldn't do for the Chosen One," Draco said sarcastically, which caused Harry to huff a laugh. "I shall be downstairs in a sea of red hair passing on the good news. If you need anything, I will be there."

"Thanks, Draco."

Draco nodded once before he slipped from the room, though he came back almost at once, flushing furiously, and muttered something about how they all forgot about the placenta, which made Harry laugh so hard that he woke the baby, and James immediately began to scream.

Harry cooed and rocked little James, and as he settled, Harry pushed out the placenta, making their bed an even bigger mess than it previously was. Draco banished it wordlessly, then said something about finally going downstairs for some rest, while Remus took over for him, levitating Harry and James gently off the bed in order to magically change the sheets and remove the spots from the mattress, then he waved his wand again, changing Harry into a clean nightshirt before he settled the father and son gently back onto the bed.

"Thank god for magic," Harry said as Remus pulled down the duvet and tucked the exhausted omega in. "I can't even *fathom* getting up right now."

Remus merely smiled as he moved to the wardrobe and changed into a set of pyjamas, though his eyes never left Harry or the newborn. His eyes were a little shiny, and though he didn't speak, Harry could still *feel* Remus's love, and he felt no loss at Remus's silence.

"Want to try giving him a feed before we go to sleep?" Remus ventured as he slipped into bed beside him. "Just so you can rest for as long as possible before he wakes you."

Harry nodded, not certain he was up to speaking when he was on the cusp of dropping off to sleep, and mechanically unbuttoned his nightshirt, while the other arm cradled his son.

James took to it much more quickly than Abigail had. He latched on and began to suckle almost instantly, and Harry smiled, easing back as he watched his baby boy take his first meal

when something odd happened. He blinked, and quite suddenly he was no longer propped up, but lying flat on his back.

Harry jolted up with a start, but relaxed when he saw James next to him in his little bassinet, and Remus, who had been sleeping next to him, chuckled as he woke from Harry's frantic movements.

"It's all right, love," he said somewhat groggily. "You fell asleep while you were nursing him, so I held him to your chest until he finished, and burped him and all the rest. I didn't want to wake you—you seemed so exhausted."

"No it's all right, I...I just didn't know what happened," Harry explained as he eased back down on the bed, and Remus wrapped an arm around him, hugging him close. "I s'pose I really was tired."

"Draco said you should stay in bed for a day or two at least, and that you'll be pretty tender for the next couple weeks," Remus said before he moved to press a soft kiss to Harry's bonding mark, making him shiver. "And no sex until you're all healed up."

"Now that's going to be the hard part, so to speak," Harry breathed teasingly. "Especially when you can't keep your hands off me."

"When my omega is so tempting, how can I *possibly* keep my hands to myself?" Remus asked, making Harry laugh as they moved in for a kiss, but it was cut short when James cried out, and Harry let out a soft groan at the interruption.

"It's all right, love, I'm here," Harry said as he moved over to the bassinet and scooped the fussy baby up. "Oh, Merlin, we're going to have our hands full with you, I can tell..."

Harry sat up, wincing with almost every motion, and unbuttoned his nightshirt to see if his son was hungry. It did not surprise Harry in the least that he was, but it was a bit of a shock when Remus got out of bed entirely, and Harry gazed up at him, a question on his lips, though he couldn't quite find the right words to ask it.

"There's two visitors who wanted to see their new baby brother," Remus explained with a small smile. "They've been here since last night, and more than a few redheaded conspirators kept them secret while you rested—perhaps they knew I'd send them right back to school."

"Where are they now?" Harry asked, his mouth twitching into a wry smile, and in the same moment the bedroom door flew open, the sound making little James whine, but not startling him enough to stop him from eating while his two older siblings hurried into the room.

"Here we are, Papa!" Abigail cried, leading the way, with Teddy behind her bearing an overfilled breakfast tray that Harry was *certain* had been prepared by Molly Weasley. "We wanted to see the baby really badly, so the headmaster let us come home and see him before we went back to school properly. Isn't that nice?"

"Very nice," Harry agreed with a laugh as he fidgeted on the bed until he was sitting up, and Harry watched Abigail slow to a stop a few paces from the bed. "How about we trade—you

two can have turns meeting your baby brother, and you can tell me all about your first day in person.”

“Abigail snuck out!” Teddy blurted out, “she's got detention already.”

“I didn't *mean* to!”

“Term has barely even *started*,” Remus said as he goggled at his daughter. “How on earth do you have detention already?”

“She's our daughter,” Harry filled in as he laughed. “Of *course* she has detention already.” He paused when James finished eating, and brought him to his shoulder with one arm, while he used the opposing hand to pat the mattress firmly. “Come on you two, up. I want to hear all about your day—without any bickering.”

Abigail happily clambered up first while Harry patted James's back until he let out a little burp, and Harry smiled, shifting his grip on the baby again until he was cradled in his arms while he said, “Abby? Want to touch him to see what he looks like?”

Abigail smiled, and reached forward in order to gingerly feel the contours of the little baby's face. She giggled when he let out a little whine, and pulled back as she said, “he looks like Daddy.”

“Yeah, he does,” Harry replied, “but he's got my hair.”

“All sticky-uppy?” she said teasingly, and Harry laughed again.

“Yeah,” he confirmed, “all sticky-uppy. Want to hold him?”

“Can I?” Abigail asked eagerly as Remus shut the door again, and Teddy carefully balanced the food tray on the nightstand.

“Of course you can, love,” Remus filled in. “Here, I'll show you how.”

Remus moved to sit on Abigail's other side, and gently took her hands, moving her arms until they were shaped in a careful oval. “You shape your arms like a cradle to support him, and keep your left arm lifted a little higher to support his head. Easy as pie.”

“Easy as...pie,” Abigail repeated thoughtfully. “Except pie isn't easy.”

Harry laughed again, and moved to hand James over to his big sister. “You'll be fine, love. Here, I'm bringing over James for you now.”

Abigail nodded, and let out a little gasp as Harry set down the newborn in her arms.

“He's so little, Papa,” she remarked while James scrunched up his little face, apparently not overly pleased by the new person holding him, but at least he wasn't crying. “How little was I when I was born?”

“Much, much littler,” Harry said with a sad sort of smile as he wrapped an arm around her, and then reached out his opposite arm to Teddy, who had climbed onto the end of the bed. He smiled shyly, his teenage embarrassment seeming to conflict with his need for parental attention, and in the end he caved in and slotted himself into his papa's opposite side.

“Remember how we told you? You were born *very* early, so you were extra small.”

“Yeah,” she said thoughtfully, almost as though she hardly dared to believe it. “But I'm not the smallest anymore, am I?”

Her words were thoughtful, but warm. It told Harry that it didn't bother her that she was no longer the baby of the family, while concurrently Harry got the distinct impression that Abigail was in no way unsettled by the reminder that she had been born very prematurely.

“No,” Harry agreed at last before he moved in to kiss her cheek, which made her giggle happily. “Not anymore.”

The End

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